WESTERN EXPATRIATES BUILDING NETWORKS IN ASIA – AN ANALYSIS BASED ON CAUSATION VS. EFFECTUATION THEORY

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Abstract

Establishing a social network promises various advantages and benefits for an expatriate. For instance, according to Wang (2001), social networks give expatriates access to social capital and resources and the social support needed to achieve better personal outcomes (Wang, 2001, p. 14). In addition, Forret (1995) states that networking provides managers with the information, ideas, and the essential equipment to perform well in their jobs (Forret, 1995, p. 3).

When expatriates are posted to a new geographical setting they need to adapt to their new environment. Their social environments will be affected as they have become detached from their existing social networks. Expatriates spend effort to maintain existing networks in their home countries as well as they try hard to establish and build new social networks in their unfamiliar host countries. The process of building new networks is an entrepreneurial activity that involves unpredictability and goal ambiguity in an unstable environment that keeps changing with the expatriate's actions (Engel, Y., Kaandorp, M., & Elfring, T., 2017, p. 35).

To explore the question 'how can expatriates develop their networks strategically when the environment is unstable and the future is unpredictable', this study analyses the network building approaches of expatriates and examines whether they apply causal or goal-directed networking approaches, or whether they apply effectuation logic, when building their new social networks. The empirical findings from ten interviews with Western expatriates from six different western countries sent to five different Asian countries (China, Thailand, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) indicate that an effectuation approach is preferred, particularly in the early stages of their assignments, but some change their networking style to a causal approach during the course of their assignment. Causal networking was generally chosen when the goals

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for networking were clearer, e.g. when the expatriates began to identify the contacts from whom they could obtain the specific information they required.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding how expatriates manage their careers and achieve success in the diverse cultural settings they encounter has become increasingly relevant (Shen & Kram, 2011, p. 529). The worldwide number of expatriates has been increasing for several years, as evidenced by a report published by Finaccord Ltd. (2014) that puts the global expatriate population in 2009 at approximately 46 million. That number has been growing steadily ever since and is estimated to amount to approximately 56.8 million in 2017 (Finaccord Ltd., 2014, para. 1).

A variety of studies have shown that networking is a crucial factor for successful expatriates committed to initiating, enabling, or sustaining their international activities. Social networks provide information, advice, and emotional support for entrepreneurial initiatives away from home (Bhave, 1994; Greve and Salaff, 2003; Johannisson, 2000; Ozgen and Baron, 2007) and as Baskar-Shrinivas et al. stated, there is a need to examine social ties and networks because an expatriates' performance can only be 10 to 15 percent accounted for by their adjustment to local standards and culture (2005).

Looking to Asia, Chen, Chang, and Lee (2015) found that guanxi – the Chinese concept of social networks – influences entrepreneurial expatriates' success through the mediating effects of access to information and resource availability. Chinese entrepreneurs cultivate and mobilize their guanxi networks to acquire information and resources for new business ventures. Granovetter (1973) summarizes the importance of social networks by postulating that social networks are 'no luxury, but are of central importance' (p. 1378).

Expatriates have been the object of considerable research with the particularly researched topic being how they adapt to their host countries and how they manage to be effective and efficient in different cultural settings. Current research builds on the assumption that expatriates rely on already established social networks (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). However, most expatriates will initially lack access to such international networks (Kalinic & Forza, 2012). The body of research into expatriates' approaches to building networks is far from exhaustive. In this study we take a new perspective on expatriates' networking actions and analyse how they act when the desired network ties cannot be identified in advance and networking outcomes cannot be predicted.

The aim of this paper is to offer a systematic analysis of the network building techniques of Western expatriates posted to Asia, a part of the world where networking is essential. This study investigates how expatriates go about establishing and forming their social networks abroad. For this purpose, empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews, producing a set of empirical data that could be used to evaluate

whether expatriates apply the rational and mechanistic approach described by the causation theory or, alternatively, follow more emergent strategies for building their social networks, as suggested by the effectuation theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Forming Social Networks for Expatriates

Networking is described as the process of developing and using contacts to gain information, advice, and moral support as an expatriate pursues their career (Puetz, 2007, p. 577). In numerous studies, networks are stated to be the key for the successful initiation, enablement, and maintenance of the international activities of an expatriate, broadly defined as 'a person who lives outside their native country'(Fechter, 2007, p. 1). Hipsher (2008) suggests that expatriates, especially those sent to Asia, need to develop their conceptual, interpersonal, and networking skills to become effective and achieve professional and personal satisfaction during their assignments(p. 17).Gibson, Hardy, & Buckley (2014) state that 'networking is thought to facilitate the development of personal and professional opportunities' (p. 146). Wang and Kanungo (2004) also confirm that establishing social, private, and business networks, is crucial for the psychological well-being of expatriates.

Liu and Shaffer (2005) indicate that, when entering foreign cultures or countries, expatriates face several uncertainties about these new local environments. In addition, because they do business in a foreign, and for them often unpredictable environment, they face significant challenges both within and beyond the work context (Shen & Kram, 2011). As their existing networks are becoming less salient, they need to form new social networks (Liu & Shaffer, 2005, p. 236). According to Johannisson (2000), such networks enable managers to navigate the ambiguous and uncertain environment successfully. There is no doubt that a newly established social network gives an expatriate access to the crucial information they need to mitigate such uncertainty.

Research confirms that a social network is a critical asset which helps to minimize the resource constraints affecting expatriates' ability to maintain agency in their new international surroundings, such as lack of information or market insights. Johanson and Vahlne (2009), amongst others, suggest that 'insidership' is an essential success factor. It gives expatriates awareness of international opportunities and helps them decide when and how to internationalize successfully despite the conditions of uncertainty (Eriksson et al., 2000; Mejri and Umemoto, 2010). This raises the theoretically as well as practically relevant question, how can expatriates network strategically with uncertainty of an unpredictable future?

Causation vs. Effectuation applied to Expatriates' Entrepreneurial Networking Activities

Considerable research has explored entrepreneurial activities, in an effort to understand entrepreneurs as reflexive agents who actively shape their approach to expand their network ties (Hallen & Eisenhardt, 2012; Udomkit & Schreier, 2017). Current research draws a picture of entrepreneurs as architects

who strategically search, plan, and pursue their pre-defined goals (Engel et al., 2017; Hallen & Eisenhardt, 2012; Viale,1992) even in an unstable environment that keeps changing with every action of the entrepreneur. The question arises, how can entrepreneurs succeed when every networking activity alters the information and situation on which pre-defined plans are based (Shepherd, Williams & Patzelt, 2015; Sarasvathy, 2008; Sarasvathy, 2001)?

Sarasvathy (2001, 2008) distinguish between two different modes of describing entrepreneurial networking processes. Causation is directed by clear goals and is primarily concerned with identifying the appropriate means to reach those goals. It reflects a rational, ex-ante planned approach. In a causation process an individual makes rational choices based on all the information available and an estimated expected utility for each option (Viale, 1992).

Emphasizing the unpredictability of the future, effectuation, on the other hand, reflects a more emergent strategy (Mintzberg, 1978), which works from a given set of means and resources towards a possible outcome. The effectuation perspective begins with a given set of resources and subsequently adds to those resources and co-creates goals by collaborating with willing partners (Galkina & Chetty, 2015, p. 649). Drew et al. stated that entrepreneurs following an effectuational approach are less dependent on predictions of the future and more likely to change their initial goals and networking objectives for a new venture (2009). Using effectuational logic, expatriates frame the future in a co-creational social networking processes (Drew, 2009). In other words, effectuation highlights the importance of social partnerships in successful entrepreneurial activities and suggests that new

markets are primarily created through alliances and other cooperative strategies (Sarasvathy, 2001, p. 251) realized by entrepreneurs as active agents.

Effectuational processes are not driven towards a predefined goal. Instead, they start from a given set of parameters: what is known, who is known and who it is possibility to know. This highlights the importance of the expatriate as an individual. On the other hand, the focus of effectuation is on the entrepreneur's relationships (Chetty et al., 2015, p. 1437). Because of uncertainty, networking requires an altruistic approach to interpersonal interactions and openness to unexpected contingencies as networking activities stimulate goal formation and transformation (Engel et al., 2017).

Until now only a few studies have examined expatriates' social networking behaviour, for example, the importance of network diversity in expatriates' boundary spanning activities (Au & Fukuda, 2002), psychological well-being (Wang & Kanungo, 2004) and the role of developers (Shen & Kram, 2011). Some attention has also been paid to how expatriates' social capital and networks affect their adjustment and performance. (For example Liu & Shaffer, 2005, Reiche et al., 2011). By extending research on how expatriates network strategically this study investigates how Western expatriates go about establishing and forming their social networks in Asia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research paper follows Mainela et al.'s (2014) statement to draw on the effectuation view (Sarasvathy, 2001) of

entrepreneurship 'which focuses on converting uncertainties into opportunities based on the means available at the moment without trying to predict the future' (Mainela, Puhakka, & Servais, 2014, p. 122) as well as Hodgkinson and Starbuck (2008) claim that both rational causality and intuitive decisions can be used in appropriate situations. The hypothesis is that expatriates as entrepreneurs may vary their networking strategies with potential partners and use parts of each approach. Sometimes expatriates will network in a causal rationality manner and sometimes in an effectuation way. Sarasvathy (2001) argues that especially in uncertain and unpredictable situations entrepreneurs who follow the effectuation process, 'take a set of means as given and focus on selection between possible effects that can be created with that set of means' (p. 245). In other words, '…effectuation is a useful approach in situations where there is no predefined universe of possibilities to explore – instead a universe is created, often unintentionally, by acts of human imagination' (Sarasvathy, 2001, p 15).

From a research perspective, no matter whether specific entrepreneurial decision making patterns are of interest, or whether expatriates' networking approaches are the focus, there is expected to be causal rationality as well as effectuation behavior observable.

Table 1 summarizes the dimensions of causation and effectuation models for five issues which are used in this study to evaluate and define what Western expatriates do in creating and shaping network ties.

Causation characteristics (table 1) state that entrepreneurs are driven by reaching project goals and the maximization of return, avoiding identified uncertainties and exploring capabilities and resources, taking advantage of outside companies' weaknesses (Read & Sarasvathy, 2005). On the other hand, effectuation involves the creation of artefacts in the absence of resources. Opportunities are created by an individual's effort without predictive control where the success of an entrepreneur derives from the means available and his or her use of creation capability (Sarasvathy, 2001).

As our research aim is to find out how expatriates network when the future is at least partially unpredictable there is a need to specify the meaning of the causational and the effectuation approach on the networking processes of an entrepreneur. Engel et al. discuss in their paper how entrepreneurs reach out and establish new contacts with people they might meet in the daily routines of their lives, arguing that it is extremely unlikely that founders are endowed with an already existing

Table 1: Dimensions of causation and effectuation

	Causation	**Effectuation**
Goals are …	Pre-defined	Emerging
View on the future	Prediction	Creation
Decision parameters include …	Maximization of expected return	Affordable loss
Dealing with uncertainty future through …	Business planning and competitive analysis	Pre-commitment and alliances
Exploitation of …	Capabilities and resources	Environmental contingencies
Attitude towards outside companies	Competition	Potential partnership

Source: Harms & Schiele (2012), Read & Sarasvathy (2005).

network of contacts catering to all their needs (2017, p. 43). Furthermore, Engel et al. define and contrast the networking approaches of entrepreneurs following either a goal-directed approach or an effectual networking approach (2017). For the purpose of coding, our study also contrasts goal-directed and effectual networking, adapting the approach of Engel et al. (2017) to analyse and characterise statements from the expatriates interviewed. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of the two approaches, goal directed vs. effectual networking.

Defining more specifically the key characteristics of both, the goal-directed and the effectual networking approach, Faschingbauer (2013) states that causators intend to achieve a specific goal while effectuators leverage the effect of circumstances and unexpected surprises while networking (Faschingbauer, 2013, pp. 66-67). According to Leek and Canning (2011), the networking approach in a causal process is determined by the actors' goals, and the causal networking approach refers to a person who deliberately seeks out potential partners for a

Table 2: Contrasting goal-directed and effectual networking

	Goal-directed networking	**Effectual networking**
Initial network situation	Networking begins with new or existing, weak or strong ties; given and fixed preferences are clearly ordered (i.e. venture goals determine networking goals)	Networking begins with existing and predominantly strong ties; emergent, flexible, and unordered (i.e. networking determines venture goals through co-creation)
Network objectives	Available to some extent, but largely unpredictable (i.e. risk)	Not available and in some cases not knowable (i.e. uncertainty)
Network motivation	Rational self-interest with predominantly instrumental motives (e.g. "What can I gain from you?")	Both self- and shared interests with predominantly developmental motives (e.g. "What can we do together?")
Network scope	Narrow: directed at specific predetermined targets (i.e. focused on meeting the "right" people and reaching them efficiently)	Broad: directed at generating unexpected contingencies (i.e. focused on meeting new people or discovering new facets in existing ties)
Relationship selection and interaction	Selection based on given objectives; interaction is primarily calculated and transactional (i.e. "how should I protect myself from opportunistic behaviour of others?")	Selection is based on self-selection, interaction is primarily based on intelligent altruism and relational embedding (i.e. "if I commit to help others, they are more likely to reciprocate")

Sourec. Adapted from Engel et al. (2017, p. 46).

particular purpose. By contrast, individuals applying an effectual networking approach have no specific purpose when networking, but let actions emerge from their means (Leek & Canning, 2011, p. 60).

In addition, Faschingbauer (2013) indicates that effectuators have a broader perspective on networking and more objectives in mind. They do not pursue random goals, but seek to do what is possible with the available means. In other words, although effectuators avoid focussing only on clearly defined goals, they do not pursue random interests. They do what they consider to be worthwhile (Faschingbauer, 2013, p. 48). Furthermore, effectuators seek to generate and exploit unexpected contingencies whereas causators carefully plan their actions to avoid contingency (Dew, Read, Sarasvathy, & Wiltbank, 2009, p. 290). Fisher (2012) explains that exploiting contingencies means turning unexpected events into profitable opportunities. This approach allows for achieving unanticipated outcomes rather than attaining a predefined goal (p. 1025).

In terms of the selection of social ties, Faschingbauer (2013) states that effectuators choose any partner who is willing to participate. Causators carefully analyse the environment and determine who they believe who are the right partners to contribute to their projects, and at the same time, distance themselves from those who do not belong in this network (Faschingbauer, 2013, p. 81).

Finally, as shown in table 2, five categories were derived from the theoretical background for this study: Initial Network Situation, Network Objectives, Network Motivation, Network Search Scope, Relationship Interaction and Selection. In line with other research, it can be expected that the two distinct forms of reasoning, i.e. causation and effectuation, are not mutually exclusive. Andersson (2011), who was cited by Ciszewska-Mlinaric et al. (2016), suggests that successful international entrepreneurs are able to shift between different decision-making logics, applying either effectuational or causational processes (p. 279).

METHODOLOGY

This study applies a qualitative research approach with interviews as the major data-collection technique. For the analytical process, the terms from the interview transcripts were classified into emergent categories. As the study's aim is to explore and represent the personal reality of the social network building of expatriates, this qualitative research method appears to be a suitable approach for insights into human and social thinking.

In line with the purpose of this study, we employed an exploratory research approach and gathered empirical evidence through qualitative interviews (Yin, 2013). Overall, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with expatriates, following predefined guidelines. The questions were chosen in order to allow open-ended answers. The approximately 25 minute interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviewed expatriates were chosen at purposive selection.

The sample represents Western expatriates who were posted to a country in Asia. Western expatriates were chosen, as their posting to Asia represents immersion in a particularly different social environment. Ten Western expatriates, all of them male, between the ages of 30 and 52 agreed to participate in this study.

Table 3 Interviewed Expatriates

Interviewee	Age	Nationality	Branch/ Industry	Expatriate Assignment to	Duration	Networking Approach
A	30	Switzerland	Marketing	Shanghai, China	3 years	Effectuation and (partially) causation
B	40	Switzerland	IT	Taipei, Taiwan	1 year	Effectuation
C	35	France	Supply Chain	Shanghai, China & Singapore	8 & 2.5 years	Effectuation
D	37	Spain	Logistics	Singapore	6 months	No clear approach, tendency towards effectuation
E	35	France	Logistics	Shanghai, China & Singapore	7 & 1.5 years	Effectuation &(partially) causation
F	32	Switzerland	Project Management	Shanghai, China	2.5 years	Effectuation
G	40	Germany	Strategy	Bangkok, Thailand & Shanghai, China	2 years, 1.5 years	Causation
H	52	Austria	Finance	Singapore	6 years	Mainly effectuation and (partially) causation
I	32	France	Finance	Singapore	5 years	Effectuation
J	33	USA	Education	Seoul, South Korea	10 years	Effectuation & causation

The data was analysed in two steps. First, the researchers analysed the interviews primarily, but not exclusively, by following the interview guidelines (deductive coding, Miles et al., 2014, p.81). Second, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify common themes (Miles et al., 2014, p. 85). These emergent themes were discussed and refined until consensus was reached in the team of researchers. Finally, the emergent themes were woven into a narrative (Miles et al., 2014, p. 91) and supported by verbatim transcripts from the data.

FINDINGS

Initial Network Situation

In line with the findings in current literature on the topic, most of the interviewees did not have any existing local social network in place at their expatriation destination. Indicating a goal-directed network approach where networking begins with new or sometimes existing, weak or strong ties (Kalinic & Forza, 2012; Engel et al., 2017), Interviewees A, B, C, G, H and J started from the beginning, building up new social networks.

When speaking about establishing a network from scratch, Interviewee A learned that the ideal occasion for meeting people in a new area is any formal involvement with other people: *'The best thing that can happen to you is that you are involved in either work, school, or any other formal group of people that you have to meet anyway, either by going to class or going to work everyday.'*

Other interviewees confirmed this statement about how to quickly and efficiently establish new work-related contacts in Asia (Interviewees B, G, H and J). Interviewee F appreciated that he was not the only expatriate who was posted to his destination, as other people from the same company were posted to China for the same period.

For interviewee F and other interviewees who had existing contacts in their new social environment to support them, it was observed that they started with their available means – their existing network – which is a starting point for an effectuation process (Engel et al., 2017). Interviewee I explained: *'What I always see in networking is to start with an entourage, the people surrounding you'*. Interviewee H activated his existing network that he knew, having been based in Singapore before. Interviewee I actively browsed the alumni network system of his university to find potential people to contact. The findings show that, with or without existing social networks, the interviewees' initial network building approaches were chosen more in line with the effectuation approach than with a goal-directed networking approach.

Network Objectives

Asking the interviewees if they predefined how and with whom they would network on arrived in Asia, and had clear networking objectives, three interviewees indicated that they did not have specific expectations for their networking activities (Interviewees E, F and J). Interviewee E was open to networking with all kinds of people. The findings show that no interviewees built up their social network strategically on arrival in their host country. Their approach – in line with the effectuation theory – was to socialize with all the potential social network partners who were ready and willing to interact. A second point of interest in this respect was to examine whether expats followed strategic networking objectives prior to arriving in the host country.

The empirical findings revealed that none of the interviewed expatriates had a clear plan or idea on how and with whom to establish their social networks before departing for Asia. Interviewee F stated that *'before I left, I thought about everything else, but not really how I would build my social network there'*. Similarly, Interviewee G indicated that there were many other things to organize before going on the assignment, rather than thinking about how or with whom to network. He added that it made a lot of sense to make these decisions when he was physically there in town.

Another interviewee, who did not have any contacts in the host country, assumed that it would be challenging to establish new contacts at his destination. He was, nonetheless, confident that it would be possible. He stated: *'I hadn't really thought much about it - how I would do it, I mean, I focused on the things that I knew were going to happen'* (Interviewee B). This attitude and approach, driven by self-confidence in building networks abroad, matches the effectuation theory, as effectuators

focus on the variables that they are able to influence and control when they face uncertainty. In contrast to following goal-directed, predefined and efficient networking strategies to avoid high effort searches, failed attempts and undesirable partner matches (Hallen & Eisenhard, 2012) the interviewees focussed on an effectuation approach, having in mind that today's dead-end match may become tomorrow's opportunity (Sarasvathy, 2001) and meaningful network partnership.

Networking Motivation

The findings show that the interviewees had an underlying idea of purpose in mind, believing that it is particularly important to create a social network abroad. For example, Interviewee A interpreted the term networking as *'maintaining relations with certain people for a purpose',* such as a benefit at a later point of time. Both the effectual and goal-directed networkers intended to gain something from the network. While the effectuators aim at what can be achieved together combined with an intelligent altruism (Sarasvathy, 2008), causators mainly consider their rational self-interest (Engel et al., 2017).

In the interviews, more evidence of the effectuation approach was found. Interviewee C, for instance, initially mentioned few self-interested expectations regarding his social network. Interviewee A carefully explained how and why he established his contacts in the work context. As Interviewee A personally, and his team, did not have enough time to regularly meet all of the people who had vital information, it was necessary that specific sales people sent him reports with the information he required. He suggested that his team was frequently very busy and would probably not

report to him *'unless they like you, and they see some sort of benefit in what they are doing for themselves'.* Consequently, Interviewee A travelled randomly throughout China to meet people with the knowledge required, to show them that it would also a benefit them if they shared the information he depended on.

A similar attitude was maintained by Interviewee I when it came to networking with locals. He explained *'you meet local people that will learn from you and that you will learn from in return'.* His approach to establishing contacts with locals in the area also matched the effectuation theory. Furthermore, Interviewee I pointed out that expatriates tend to be much more open than they would be in their home countries. He explained that, from his own experience, *'expatriates are outside of their comfort zone at the beginning, as you are outside of your country, you don't know many people, so you tend to socialize more'.* Even more specifically, he explained networking as a snowball effect. After meeting one person, that person would introduce ten other people, and so growth continuous exponentially for the benefit of all parties. Interviews showed that in uncertain conditions entrepreneur's networking actions are driven by both collective and self-interest, restricted by a predetermined level of affordable loss (Engel at al., 2017, p. 45).

In terms of the motivational aspects of networking related to the goal-directed style of networking, Interviewee H stated this about his work-related contacts, *'this is driven by the fact that I need to know certain things'.* He made sure that he was involved in certain business talks and seminars and met the people who had the necessary information. In addition, Interviewee G indicated that, as he

was working in a strategic working environment, it was crucial to engage with the insiders in certain industries. His objective was to link up with people who were knowledgeable about the sectors in question and, indeed, willing and able to share those insights. Generally, the observed approaches of Interviewees H and G seem in line with a goal-directed and non-altruistic networking approach.

Network Search Scope

Previous findings showed that networking approaches, when faced with uncertainty, are activities that demand flexibility with regards to goals, with networking actions intended to bring network partners together who will co-create and redesign venture ideas (Engel at al., 2017, p. 46). Another question of interest is whether expatriates applied a defined and narrow scope in their search for potential contacts and network partners. Many examples were provided that suggested a broad scope: For instance, Interviewee I stated that he approached many people purely randomly and indicated that *'first I tend to speak to everyone'*. Interviewee B also applied a broad search when establishing his social network and similarly stated *'I just wanted to know, to get in touch with as many people as possible'*. Moreover, Interviewee C indicated that he networked on a regular basis *'by lots of means'*. The approach of Interviewee F was also broad in the sense that he participated in networking events which were not only related to work, but also to matters of education or presentations about new developments.

Two interviewees had few potential partners in their immediate environment (Interviewees B and C). Interviewee C, who was based in a remote city in China, suggested that the nature of the very small community of other expatriates at his location required him to broaden his network by travelling to the provincial capital of Guangzhou in order to network with new people on special occasions, such as Bastille Day (Interviewee C).

Explaining the broad scope of his network, Interviewee C stated *'you never know what will happen in the future, you never know your next project, and the more people you know, the more connections, the more you can do'*. His statement is clearly in line with the effectuation theory, as effectuators deal with uncertainty in exactly the way that Interviewee C dealt with his uncertain networking prospects.

Three other interviewees mentioned the opportunities provided by unexpected contingencies creating a broader search scope (Interviewees A, F, and I). For instance, Interviewee F explained: *'I mean, you extend your network and with that your possibilities'*. Another expatriate heard from various sources that other *'people just hang out together and then suddenly have a brilliant idea'* and either found companies which, in some instances, are very successful or create useful new concepts (Interviewee I). The interviews showed that effectual networking in uncertain circumstances changes the portfolio of network ties and scope, generating unexpected contingencies and enabling the serendipitous emergence of new entrepreneurial targets (Drew, 2009; Engel et al., 2017).

Three interviewees explained that the very fact of being an expatriate in Asia ensures a higher probability of meeting an influential

person. With this in mind, they tried to generate occasions of this nature, as they were based in an environment which was advantageous for them in terms of having access to people who would be difficult to approach or even impossible to meet in Europe (Interviewees F, G, and I). For instance, Interviewee I stated that *'you have access to the crowd that would be difficult to access in your home country'*.

Arguments against a broad scope for networking were provided by two interviewees (G and H): One stated that as *'you have time constraints, you really need to monitor how many people you should meet'* (Interviewee G). As a golden rule, he explained that it is not possible to have meaningful contacts with more than six people. In addition, Interviewee H indicated that he achieved a network of a nature that was sufficient for both sides. He would only get in touch with a person if he or she could benefit him in some way which matches the goal-directed networking approach.

Relationship Interaction and Selection

In terms of relationship interactions, two interviewees made statements that related to the effectuation approach (C and H). Interviewee C explained, when referring to a specific supplier contact, that it was necessary for the relationship to be based on mutual interests. He listened carefully to what his business partner told him to ensure a *'meaningful win-win kind of connection'*.

Interviewee A stated that having a network in the business context is absolutely crucial in China. He indicated how vital a network of supporters was by stating that *'in China, if you don't have a network of supporters,*

you can't get anything done'. He added that *'a lot of Western managers that come here see relationship building as very time consuming and try for a shortcut, which is usually counterproductive'*. Interviewee H applied a goal-directed approach to such interactions in the professional context. He stated that *'I network professionally in order to be sure to get the information I need'*.

When selecting their contacts, many interviewees mentioned that they selected the people who were interesting to them by themselves, particularly in terms of their private social environments (Interviewees A, B, G and H). For instance, Interviewee H joined a Buddhist temple with a community of 350 worshippers, which was an important social network for him. Besides, four interviewees indicated that they established a social network for the simple purpose of not being alone (Interviewees D, F, H, and J).

Most interviewees mentioned that they chose people instinctively based on first impressions or similar interests (C, D, F, H, and I). Interviewee F established a circle of friends through an existing contact and explained that *'for sure, you select the person who is to a certain extent interesting to you'*. Interviewee G mentioned that *'usually you hang out more with other expats, people who are in the same situation as yourself'*. Similar observations are made by Vissa (2012) who observed that entrepreneurs try to establish networks contacts to open up a sounding board to reflect their problems and questions.

Finally, the interviewees mainly stated that instead of trying to predict the outcome of an opportunity offered by a potential network partner, the focus is on network actions that result in partners willing to pre-commit

something to a venture in the present (Wiltbank et al., 2006).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the causation and effectuation theories in terms of network building approaches employed by Western expatriates posted to Asia. Overall, more evidence for an effectuation approach was identified than for a causation approach. The empirical findings from the ten interviewed expatriates suggest that they tend to apply an effectuation approach to building their social networks in their uncertain environments. In addition, almost all the expatriates applied an effectuation networking approach particularly in the early phases of their assignments when constructing their networks. The causation approach tended to be applied more when expatriates had more knowledge about whom they had to approach to obtain the specific information they required. Even taking into account the limitation of the small sample we hope that our research adds some information to what is known on how expatriates sent to Asia shape their social networks.

From a managerial perspective, we suggest that by taking uncertainty into account expatriates benefit from following an efficient effectuation, not solely goal-orientated approach, to establishing networks. As the interviewees indicated, being embedded within a community and within social groups is a natural demand of human beings. Wang (2001) explains that social support refers to anything which is beneficial to a person's physical and mental health, such as giving care, love, tangible help or technical assistance (p. 26). Moreover, the findings suggest that it is advantageous for Western expatriates in Asia

to use their social environment for networking, as it promises better access to successful people in business when compared to their normal environment as managers in Europe. The interviewed expatriates mainly selected their social ties intuitively based on their individual interests as a first step. In a more specifically professional context, some expatriates noted that they selected their professional contacts with a goal-directed approach, based on the information they required, once they felt more familiar with the new environment in the host country.

An interesting outcome of this research is that the majority of the interviewees did not apply an exclusively causation or effectuation-centric strategy and tended to follow an effectuation approach at the beginning of their assignments, when no network or only a very few contacts were available (e.g. Interviewees A, C, E and J). On the other hand, four of the ten interviewed expatriates applied an exclusive effectuation approach (Interviewees B, D, F and H). Interestingly, most of these expatriates spent a relatively short period of time in their Asian assignments. Nevertheless, these findings are in line with existing literature, which suggests that individuals favour the effectuation approach as this approach is more effective when the environment is uncertain.

In conclusion, none of the interviewed expatriates had a clear, goal-orientated plan for building their social networks. Opportunism as well as altruism are intertwined as expatriates instinctively understand that helping others may also help themselves (Van de Ven et al., 2007). Thus, when expatriates are unsure about their aims, they can simply start supporting others and eventually improve the chances for reciprocity (Saxton et al., 2016). Not surprisingly the interviewed expatriates

built their relationships based on win-win interactions and ensured that a potential contact could also benefit from the relationship. Moreover, almost all expatriates applied a broad search scope when approaching new people, often in order to generate unexpected contingencies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is limited in its scope, which affects our ability to generalize from its findings. Because a limited number of expatriates were interviewed there is no comparative analysis among the countries the expatriates come from and where they were sent, linking the change of network approaches from effectuation to causation. As a consequence, similar research could be conducted in other countries for comparison purposes, to investigate if there is any country specific preference for a specific networking approach, and if yes, why so.

Beyond the question of country specific influence future research could take a closer look at how exactly, and under which circumstances, expatriates change their network building approach from an effectual to a more goal-orientated direction in correlation with the degree of uncertainty. Furthermore, it would be interesting to focus on expatriates' individual feelings of uncertainty and as that diminishes to explore the effect of the chosen networking approach. Another research question suggested is examining whether expatriates learn to vary their network building strategies to match changing contexts.

Finally, yet importantly, it would be interesting to apply other research methods to obtain more insights into how expatriates utilize their networks to overcome obstacles when engaging in business on the international level.

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