

**For assignments from Japan to Switzerland on Long-Term-Assignment-basis, the most important phase of the assignment cycle is the preparation phase (pre-departure phase)**

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## 1. Introduction

Between February and June 2020 Mercer ran their regular Worldwide Survey of International Assignment Policies and Practices (Mercer 2020). The survey took place during a challenging time caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the more than 400 companies which participated in the survey, 93% of them indicated having long-term assignments as a main category of international assignments, despite the trend of the increasing diversity of different assignment types (Mercer 2020, 11).

The author currently works as a Global Mobility professional for an engineering company with its roots in Switzerland. In 2010 the Swiss company was taken over by one of Japan's largest industrial and engineering firms, thus making the exchange of knowledge and technologies an essential component of the business' success.

Due to the expansion of newly emerging markets such as the Middle East and Asia-Australia, and the still expanding conventional European market, an enhanced cooperation between the Swiss based company and the Japanese parent company is key to successfully developing stronger project execution capabilities, as well as enhancing collaborative resource utilization. The Swiss based company provides patented technology and essential knowledge, enabling the parent company to offer comprehensive projects as a complete package, thereby profiting from the technical background of its Swiss subsidiary.

With reference to the above, during the past years the author has experienced an increase of long-term international assignments from Japan to Switzerland, for both employee development and business needs purposes. This trend follows the outcome of Mercer's survey confirming that the main reasons for sending employees on international assignments are career management / leadership development opportunities and providing specific technical skills not available locally (50% of the respondents respectively) (Mercer 2020, 17). The reasons for international assignments will be introduced in detail in Chapter 2.2.

From 2014 to 2016, most assignments fell into the category of career development for junior staff employed by the Japanese parent company and assigned to Switzerland in order to develop their professional skills.

Since 2018, however, the author has observed that the purpose of the assigned population has started to lean more towards meeting the needs of the company for providing specific technical and leadership skills, led by the Japanese parent company. Furthermore the Japanese parent company has been sending members of the supervisory board on assignments as well.

When considering the population (gender, familial status, position within the organization), there are various essential factors that must be taken into account during the entire cycle of international assignments in order to ensure that all assignments are successful and lead to a win-win-situation.

When it comes to major culture differences between the two countries analyzed in Section 3, the author commits this thesis to study the theoretical part of the assignment cycle (further described in Section 2) pointing out the importance of the preparation (pre-departure) phase, which is also highlighted by many academics and acknowledged as essential for minimizing the risk of assignment failure. Assignment failure is commonly understood as either "not meeting the assignment objectives" or "as an assignee's performance falling below expectations" (Mercer 2020, 25).

The former can be prevented by providing assignment-related training and dedicating time to prepare for the relocation, as detailed in Chapter 2.3.1 - the participants of Mercer Survey listed under top five factors of failing an assignment as "difficulty adjusting to the host country", "spouse

or partner unhappiness” and “other family concerns” (Mercer 2020, 25). As to the latter (an assignment failure caused by the assignee’s failure to perform to expectations in the present country combination) this might lead to personal and professional devastation in the home country. Thus, the author dedicates the second half of this thesis to cultural differences between those specific countries, leading to recommendations given to both cultures for a successful reconciliation and adjustment in the host country, which are examined in greater depth in Section 3.

The aim of this thesis is not to compare countries other than Switzerland and Japan, or to bring a more general overview about European and Asian culture and assigning people from one culture to the other, for “every culture is different” (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020).

The author instead will focus only on the two above mentioned countries to preclude any cultural stereotypes.

In order to reach a conclusion, the author studied technical literature and surveys. In order to examine practical examples of assignment preparedness, the author ran a short survey with current and repatriated assignees from Japan to Switzerland. In addition, a specific survey was created for the author’s peers in Japan and in Switzerland. The anonymised results of the surveys are presented in Chapter 4, stating solely the gender and familial status of the participants.

In conclusion, this thesis reflects the theoretical knowledge of culture, bringing together eight years’ of experience in managing Long Term Assignments (LTAs) from Japan to Switzerland. This paper can furthermore be seen as learning material for Swiss and Japanese culture, while also analysing the general rules and recommendations that are important in an assignment situation.

All of the above points will lead to the following conclusion that

**For assignments from Japan to Switzerland on LTA-basis, the most important phase of the assignment cycle is the preparation phase (pre-departure phase).**

The author will among others answer questions such as:

- Why is a preparation phase of assignment essential for a successful assignment for both employee and employer?
- What could be the consequences of an assignment preparation phase handled with a sub-standard level of care?
- Why is the preparation phase more important than other phases e.g. repatriation phase?
- Why it is important to consider different cultures for a successful assignment?

The objective of this thesis, however, is mainly to guide any professional through the assignment process, as well as for internal and external stakeholders, who are not experienced in posting personnel abroad. Thus, in terms of the latter this paper can be considered as a theoretical guideline which provides suggestions on what should be considered when preparing international assignments particularly from Japan to Switzerland, and potentially vice versa.

## **2. International Assignment**

### **2.1. Definition of International Assignment**

To summarise, an international assignment is a cross-border transfer of the right person to the right place at the right time.

In literature, the transferred person is commonly referred to as an expatriate or international assignee “given the range of alternative forms of international transfers” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 162).

There is a variety of types of assignments - long-term assignment, short-term assignment, self-initiated assignment, virtual assignment, international transfer, international business traveler, etc. Research has shown that, despite the increase of alternative types of international assignments, the long-term assignment remains the traditional way of sending personnel abroad, and is applied by “90 per cent of the multinational companies, as stated in a recent survey of KPMG ran in 2018” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 125).

In the context of this thesis, the author will focus only on international long-term assignments that last between two and five years, with a planned return to the home country.

“The total number of expatriates is estimated to amount to around 66.2 million worldwide and has been on a steady rise” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 1). There is evidence that between the 1960s and 1980s the international assignees could be commonly identified as married male senior executives. By contrast, in the present day, the background of international assignees varies by age and motivation for international experience. Nonetheless, research has shown once more that the majority of long-term international assignees are generally highly qualified professionals, either married or in a long-term partnership with dependents. As in the past, 75 per cent of present international assignees are male.

Admittedly, present research literature introduces three demographic trends that have a great impact on the composition of the international assignment population in current times:

- Number of dual career households
- Increasing number of female assignees
- Increased lifespan of the global population

As a consequence, Global Mobility practitioners anticipate a change in the international assignment population in future surveys, which should reflect these demographic trends.

### **2.2. Reasons for International Assignment**

Internalisation of multi-national companies is in most of the cases supported by international assignees who are “responsible for tasks such as opening new international markets, handling politically sensitive business, training host national employees” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 143).

International assignments are recognised by academicians as useful tools for companies’ success when it comes to global competition.

Research has also shown that the assignee is increasingly recognised as a cultural transferor between the home and the host country. Furthermore, multinational companies can decide to assign staff to be a translator of local conditions, to manage countries with higher political and/or cultural risks, as well as for observation and control of activities of the distinct host country entity.

“The key point that companies should realise is the fact that expatriation is a strategic tool to achieve specific organizational goals and needs to be used as such (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 170).

Already in the 1970s, researchers suggested three motives for companies assigning staff internationally:

- Transfer of technical or/and managerial competences
- Management development (individual development)
- Organisational development

According to (Mercer 2020), 50 per cent of responding companies assign their employees for both career management opportunities and for specific technical skills that are not available in the host country. For 40 per cent of respondents, the second main reason for international assignments is know-how transfer, followed by the provision of particular managerial knowledge and the fulfillment of project related needs (confirmed by 37 and 36 per cent of participants respectively). A survey of another consultant (held in 2015) shows that 60 per cent of interviewees agreed that they move staff for personal development purposes.

This analysis can easily be extended further to another source of literature stating that “many firms are reported as identifying knowledge transfer and acquisitions as the primary reason for sending expatriates on assignment” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 12).

The author studied internal international assignment policies of several companies within similar industry sectors. For them, the aim of assigning personnel is to “provide the employees with opportunity to grow and to develop careers with the organization” (Sulzer 2022). They further see international assignments as a “key element of business and career development” (ABB 2014).

### 2.2.1. Transfer of Technical or/and Managerial Competences

The purpose of an international assignment is often driven by not only the location of the company’s current and future growth, but also whether the organization has a workforce in place to achieve development.

If the local talent pool is not technically strong for the aim of the company, there is most probably a need for international assignment. This is mainly applicable in developing markets where the local population hasn’t had the opportunity to develop the needed skills, or the labor is not available.

From a different perspective the company may be present / enter markets where the local nationals are highly educated and skilled technically, but there may be little or no management experience. There may not be sufficient executive leadership to run the new or expanding business, so assignees are needed, at least temporarily, for executive activities.

These individuals can be assigned “with the objective of training of managers in the host country in the values and ways of working in the organization (Bonache , Brewster und Suutari 2001, 5).

### 2.2.2. Career Development

International assignments are undoubtedly one of the fastest ways to build one’s own global talent pool within an organisation. Furthermore, employees increasingly recognise the importance of global experience in their career development. To obtain international experience, employees are generally more willing to accept international assignments. This phenomenon can be observed by generation Z entering the labor market.

Researchers have identified two reasons for individuals willing to go on international assignment: “the desire to have an international experience and the desire to improve in one’s professional career” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 189).

The above statement has been also confirmed by a survey run by a consulting company in 2015 that concludes with the statement that the right time for an international assignment is within the first six years of a professional’s career, as indicated by 74 per cent of interviewees.

### **2.3. Phases of international assignment**

In this chapter, the author examines the international assignment cycle in detail, as the elements and procedures play a significant role in global workforce strategies.

The literature refers to three distinguishable phases of the international assignment process that are analysed further in subsequent chapters.

#### **2.3.1. Before Assignment**

In theory, an assessment and selection process is a formal process through which companies identify employees who are likely to succeed on a particular international assignment. These processes generally consider many factors, including the employee’s personal attributes, family situation, work experience, and skill sets.

Using an efficient formal assessment and selection process will identify those employees who possess attributes and competences which are likely to result in them adapting quickly and successfully on an assignment. It will also identify those employees who possess attributes which could create challenges for both the employee and the company, and could therefore lead to an assignment failure or early termination on assignment. This may also lead to a lack of return on investment.

For a large organisation with a large volume of assignees it is advisable to make use of consulting firms which specialise in assessments to ascertain if both the employee and the employee’s family are suited for an overseas experience.

Nevertheless, “in most organizations, selection processes are informal, which allows prejudices more scope” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 14). Research has shown that, in the 1990s, informal selection processes were commonly applied and known as “coffee machine” system. According to a survey of a consulting firm conducted in 2019 some twenty years later, surprisingly, 89 per cent of respondents confirmed that international assignees were sourced and chosen by the internal selection process of the respective business / department.

The same survey provides an additional observation about the selection process: 60 per cent of participants do not use any kind of process in order to assess the assignees’ international competences.

In the pre-assignment stage, decision-making, preparation, and separation can consume a lot of time and energy, therefore the academicians emphatically recommend that considerable time be dedicated to this phase, because it has both a positive and a negative impact on an assignment’s success for both employee and the company.

According to the literature, the first study of selection criteria for international assignments was carried out in the 1980s.

The researchers identified four competences that contribute to the success or failure of international assignments:

- Technical competence on the job
- Personal traits or relational abilities
- Ability to cope with environmental variables
- Family situation

For “appropriate professional and technical competence is a prerequisite for most international assignments” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 336).

Practitioners also refer to an additional (and no less important) competence for a successful assignment: expatriation willingness is an essential factor for expatriate success. “Employees with higher expatriation willingness are more likely to accept expatriate assignments and adjust better to the host country environment than unwilling candidates” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 34). Expatriation willingness is undoubtedly affected by characteristics of the host country as well as the occupational role commitment.

Literature confirms that the research on the selection process has been focused predominantly on the “visible” aspects, such as hard skills rather than on the personal circumstances of an assignee.

(Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 148) recommend that, besides a review of personality characteristics, also “language skills and prior international experience may be included in a selection process.”

Once an appropriate candidate is selected, an intense period commences for the assignee. The pre-assignment is a time of gathering information about the new location, position, timing, and policy benefits.

Assignees must also weigh the implications of accepting the new assignment for their career path. It is critical to involve families in the discussion, and work toward mutual commitment with the spouse and children. There are stresses of uncertainty, fear of financial risk, threat of disruption, and loss of control.

Assignees can also benefit from a self-assessment option to measure international competences, because not everyone can be successful working and living abroad.

Once the decision to accept the assignment is made, assignees are faced with a multitude of tasks to be accomplished in preparation for departure: leaving their current housing, packing, and utilizing relocation services. This phase can be accompanied by confusion, anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, and perhaps even at times, decision paralysis.

Literature sees the purpose of the assignees’ preparation as “providing them with the necessary elements that will help them perform and succeed during the assignment” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 41).

Academicians recommend providing the following examples of support to assignees and their families (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 154)

- Education or training assistance
- Career enhancement reimbursement
- Career planning assistance
- Assistance in finding employment



- Financial policies: fees for employment agencies, seed money to start a new business, fees to join professional associations, compensation of the lost wages and benefits, financial support to engage in volunteer service
- Non-financial policies: organisation-sponsored support groups for partners, employment networks coordinated with other global firms, office space in the host location for the purpose of job hunting

Pre-assignment is also the period when it is time to say good-bye. Leaving career and community support systems can bring on a sense of sadness, as well as physical and mental exhaustion from all that has gone on in preparation for the international relocation.

Many companies send the employee and either the spouse or the spouse and family overseas for an initial pre-assignment trip as part of the preparation phase. This trip has many objectives, including looking for a residence and making applications to schools. At the same time the assignee and their family have a unique opportunity to get the first real hints of the foreign culture while being physically present in the host country, which can “help them create realistic expectations during (or prior) selection” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 148).

Language and intercultural training are essential components for the employee and accompanying family as they help to advance the employees’ skills and thus, the employee’s ability to implement the company’s global business objectives more effectively.

From the perspective of managing day-to-day life in the host country, a rudimentary knowledge of the basics of the local language can help the assignee and their family to adjust to the host location and to deal with everyday living issues. From a business perspective, being able to communicate in the local language may also be necessary for the employee to effectively perform their role; the assignee’s linguistic efforts would also be appreciated by the co-workers, which might in turn accelerate the integration process.

Cultural differences can be confusing to the employee and family and contribute to assignment failure. While on assignment, it is important for the employee and family to be respectful of the local culture. In addition, understanding the cultural differences between the home and host countries is critical to the employee’s ability to perform effectively on the job. It is therefore crucial for the employee and family to learn what is and is not acceptable behavior in the host country culture as well as how to conduct themselves in business and social settings for the purpose of meeting the expectations of all involved parties, including those of the company.

“Relationship and communication abilities help the expatriate build close interpersonal contacts that improve collaboration and facilitate knowledge transfer to the local unit, also giving the person access to local knowledge” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 336).

Cross-cultural training is in detail described in Chapter 3.3.

An essential component of the preparation phase is documenting all the terms and conditions of the assignment in writing, because “the financial packages that tend to go with expatriate assignment also play a part” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 35).

It is important to acknowledge that the international assignment package, which consists of premiums, allowances, home travels, and other benefits such as schooling allowance or spousal support, among others, is far more generous compared to the remuneration package of locally employed staff. That being said, “higher expatriate rewards are deemed to be justified to compensate for additional expenses and risks that they would not be subjected to if they had stayed at home” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 187).

Consultation about an assignee's individual personal income tax situation should also be included in this phase. This type of guidance is known as a tax briefing and is part of the practical arrangements that occur during preparation phase, such as payroll, insurance, immigration, moving arrangements, housing, and schooling.

As supporting material, the author summarised a pre-departure checklist that can be used as a guideline for assignment preparation (Attachment 8). "Research suggests that a lengthy list of traits, skills, and capabilities are essential for success in an expatriate assignment, and these capabilities can either be selected for or developed through training and experience" (McEvoy und Buller 2013, 214).

Nonetheless, for too many companies the only criteria for sending an employee on an international assignment are the employee's technical skills and willingness to go. Admittedly with so little attention on the selection process, the risk of the assignees and/or their family experiencing difficulties is high and there is a greater risk of assignment failure with the commensurate negative impact on all involved parties: employee, family, and the company.

### 2.3.2. On Assignment

International assignments have a major impact on both private and business life, "therefore achieving work-life balance while on international assignment can be especially difficult" (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 154).

Most assignments can be broken into four phases:

- Arrival
- Adjustment
- Acceptance, and
- Assimilation or adaptation

Although every assignee is unique, academics estimate that it takes about two months after arrival for the first adjustment and about nine months for a full cycle from arrival to adaptation.

During the first two months in a new country, some assignees and accompanying family may avoid interactions in their new cultural context as they learn about their environment. After the initial euphoria of arriving in a new cultural space, assignees and involved family members must learn to interact socially and professionally.

In doing so, they may experience what is commonly referred to as "culture shock" as they recognize the need to adapt to new attitudes, beliefs, lifestyles, and ways of doing things.

Culture shock tends to happen when communication breaks down and social cues are missed. It is not uncommon for assignee, spouse, and children to experience irritation, frustration, and a lack of confidence. Some may even exhibit depression and negativity as they work through the challenges of adjusting to a new cultural context. "Children can face obstacles such as saying goodbye to friends, making new friends, starting a new school, communicating through language barriers, having inadequate peer relations, lacking in peer acceptances, and overall disruption to personal life" (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 155).

Acceptance begins as assignees and the family start to understand their new cultural context and build relationships with their colleagues.

Assimilation occurs when assignees and their families have spent a significant amount of time in their cultural context and have had positive experiences to help them adjust. When assimilation

has occurred, increased enjoyment and confidence can be recognized with a sense of belonging in their new cultural context being observed.

Throughout the assignment, undoubtedly, it is essential to check in with the employee personally, to determine whether there is anxiety, individual or family stress, or other problems that might be managed. Keeping connected with assignees can help the company retain employees who are on international assignments as well as help employees repatriate back to the home country.

Often, it is the assignee's partner and family who are faced with the most difficult challenges. The employee may go to work every day and integrate into the corporate culture he or she already knew and continue to speak the home language. The spouse, however, must integrate into the local environment, deal with communicating in the local language and learn how to run errands and a household in a foreign location.

Therefore, "certain types of training are significantly more effective if they are carried out after the arrival of the expatriate" (Selmer 2000, 52). Also, during the assignment "organizations have developed to encourage international assignees' work-life balance cross-cultural training for families, in-country support, career assistance, accompanying partner support, and general work-life assistance" (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 154).

Admittedly, those phases can occur at any stage of the assignment, but careful preparation in advance of the assignment, as described in chapter 2.3.1. may significantly minimize uncomfortable situations, as the assignee and the family have realistic expectations and are prepared for such circumstances.

### 2.3.3. After Assignment

While an employee is on long-term assignment, changes (such as in management, organizational structure, policy, and/or layoffs) may occur within the company in the home country. These ongoing changes are another reason for the assignee and the company to stay in contact while the employee is on assignment.

Most international assignees will eventually return to their home countries, a process referred to as repatriation. This post-assignment phase of the career cycle is often overlooked by those responsible for supporting international assignments, which is unfortunate, because it presents a significant and immediate challenge for assignees and their families, and to companies' return on the investment they have made in the assignee.

A formal repatriation program should be mandatory for all international assignees. Given the right support and assistance, the returning assignee should be able to make a smooth transition back into the home country structure and be able to utilize the skills, talents, experiences, and connections established overseas to the company's benefit in a new home country job.

Assignees and their families face a variety of personal challenges during repatriation. They may have idealized their memories of home and be disappointed that everything is not as they remember. Former friends, neighbors, and family may be busy with their own lives.

Assignees also may not be aware of how much their experience has changed them and their own perspective and personality. Their home environment may no longer feel right, since "international assignment can influence one's identity" (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 137).

Reintegration training for assignees is the most familiar form of repatriation support. It allows assignees and their families to discuss personal and social issues, in addition to professional

challenges, in a neutral environment. Internal debriefs can also be useful if they offer assignees the opportunity to share what they have accomplished and learned with their colleagues.

Furthermore, mentoring programs can be valuable in helping assignees through their assignment. With adequate commitment on the part of the mentors and employees, this is also true of the repatriation phase. Some companies implement a sponsor program before the assignment is even offered, requiring sponsors to vouch for and commit to mentoring the assignee throughout the assignment and reintegration into the home office.

“Research suggests that upwards of 38 per cent of repatriates leave their employing organization within a year of returning home” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 126), therefore the repatriation process has to be carefully planned and executed already in the preparation phase in order to maximize the return on investment for both employer and employee.

Many academics consider repatriation as successful, “when key organizational objectives performed by a repatriate have been achieved” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 133); from the perspective of employee, however, the assignment is successful, when the assignee’s personal goals have been met. These may vary depending on the individual assignee’s expectations and should be therefore defined already during the pre-assignment phase.

## **2.4. Chapter Summary**

In the previous chapters the author focused on the assignment cycle, pointing out the importance of the preparation phase in order to strengthen the likelihood of the assignment’s success.

In today’s global world the ability to transfer hard skill expertise across cultures is critical to business. “However, an expat assignment can be a risky endeavor” (Expatriate Focus 2018). “Empirical studies have confirmed that expatriate selection is a multi-faceted subject and that personality characteristics as well as interpersonal skills are very important” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 182). By contrast, in practice assignees are primarily selected by the line manager / business reflecting only their technical skills and hard competences, arguing that cross-cultural competences are difficult to identify. Results of the latest surveys indicate that less than 20 per cent of responding companies have a formal candidate pool.

An important note to be acknowledged is that “International assignments are not right for every person or every family. Full involvement throughout the process by the employee and all accompanying family members is therefore critical” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 145). The life stage of the family is a crucial factor in the decision to accept or reject an international assignment. Critical evaluation and self-assessment of key issues and the personal circumstances of the assignee and his or her family may lead to a decision as to whether the assignment is the best thing for every affected party, as presented in Chapter 2.3.1.

As (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 107) admit, “aside from the compensation costs of expatriate, getting them ready to move and work in a foreign location can be quite expensive.” The remuneration package could be between two and five times more than the remuneration package received by the assignee’s counterpart in the home country. The companies wishing to assign staff to the host country shall hence invest additional costs in selection and preparation of the assignee and involved family members. Then undoubtedly “effective recruitment, selection, and preparation can significantly impact expatriate performance” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 31).

“In spite of some lingering doubts, there is substantial evidence of the positive outcomes of cross-cultural training. Many studies have assessed the effectiveness of cross-cultural training and shown the numerous benefits that expatriates derive from cross-cultural training” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 390).

Furthermore, it should be obvious that cross-cultural training (described in detail in Chapter 3.5.) contributes to assignee's career success, but it is also crucial for achievement of company's target of international assignment. Despite the importance and positive effect of cross-cultural training, surveys conducted in 2010 and 2012 demonstrated that, of the companies who responded, only 17 and 24 per cent respectively made cross-cultural training mandatory. Researchers furthermore stated in 2000s that "the main reason for the lack of provision of cross-cultural training appears to be the assumption that "good management is good worldwide"" (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 389).

"Being asked to undertake an international assignment is an exciting proposition for most people" (Expatriate Focus 2018), but it is nevertheless uncertain and challenging. The individual is faced with problems and issues that are unfamiliar, and consequently requiring an investment of time to cope with.

It must be recognized that it is not only the employee being relocated, but the family is as well, and thus any family concerns could be major issues. Research indicates that the biggest reason for failed international assignments is the family's lack of adjustment. Therefore "inclusion of all family members in cross-cultural training is important because of the strong impact of their global adjustment on the expatriate's adjustment" (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 44), running parallel with other activities in the preparation phase.

"Business coach Pdraig O'Sullivan says a failure rate of between 25% and 50% means preparation before an employee heads overseas is key" (Expatriate Focus 2018). Even though academics consider adequate training to be essential for a successful assignment for both employee and the company, "in most cases, most expatriates get very little preparation. This is largely because of the very short time between the decision to send them and them leaving for the new country" (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 46). Admittedly, this phenomenon can be observed due to the extensive list of examined activities which do not give cross-cultural training and individual preparation the high priority they deserve.

Researchers further advise the assignee and accompanying family members to spend some days in the host country in order to get general information and sense of foreign culture, as being introduced in Chapter 2.3.1.

For several decades, the phenomenon of assignees' adaptation has been recognized as critical for an assignment's success. For (Perera und Teng 2016, 480) "although there are many reasons for expatriate failure, the integral premise of much of the literature is that adjustment difficulties are at the root of expatriate failure".

In this regard the author sees an apparent link to lectures' recommendation of providing follow-up cross-cultural training during the assignment as a continuation to the cross-cultural training given in the preparation phase. Providing this type of follow-up cross-cultural training could be an effective tool in the reduction of cultural shock, because "rapid adjustment will be positive for all family members, allowing them to transition into a "routine stage" or to a "feeling at home" stage, where they can feel settled in their new environment, form new networks, and acquire the host language" (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 58).

For a successful integration and adjustment, most practitioners recommend that regular contact be maintained between the assignee and the home country, not only for performance management, but mainly for the maintenance of the relationship in order to prevent reverse shock at the end of the assignment that is described in Chapter 2.3.3.

In addition, local HR and local co-workers play a significant impact on the assignee's adjustment process that is recognizable in the survey which the author ran for the purpose of this thesis, and which is presented in detail in Chapter 4.

The completion of an assignment and the repatriation should be planned carefully and executed in a timely fashion, as highlighted in Chapter 2.3.3. Literature suggests that having the regulations governing the assignee's repatriation already written in the assignment agreement can result in reduced levels of anxiety for the assignee – begin with the end in mind. Repatriation should, as a consequence, undoubtedly be part of the pre-departure phase. Nonetheless, the survey conducted by a consulting company demonstrates that 36 per cent of organisations who responded start the repatriation process six months before the effective end date of assignment, and over 50 per cent begin the repatriation process between three to six months before the assignment's end date.

Early research reported that numerous repatriated assignees leave their employer within two years. The reasons for such a decision vary depending on the assignment itself, but also because of the missing regulated repatriation process.

“It is surprising that academic studies continue to find assignees to be largely unsatisfied with the repatriation support and to perceive their positions upon repatriation to be inadequate, leading to repatriate turnover intentions” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 189), despite the large number of academics pointing out the importance of including a repatriation discussion before the effective start of international assignment.

The repatriation phase is seen by literature and researchers as a major issue for an organization. That being said, when the end of assignment is discussed ahead of time in the preparation phase, the risk of failure or resignation of employee can be significantly reduced. If this type of discussion takes place, the assignee is cognizant of the next career steps within the organization and can decide whether to accept the international assignment or not, balancing the pros and cons.

### **3. Culture**

#### **3.1. Definition of Culture**

In the previous section the author described international assignments, pointing out the importance of the preparation phase. This chapter focuses on culture and how the possession of intercultural competences, potentially gained through intercultural training, may support the preparation phase to lower the risk of assignment failure.

“Culture is like gravity: you do not experience it until you jump six feet into the air” (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 6).

For an easier understanding of the definition (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 74) acknowledge that “culture is to a society what memory is to an individual.” It is the learned way humans think, behave and act that differs between cultures over the globe. Culture, as the shared experience of members, stems from values and rules conveyed from generation to generation.

Research literature further describes culture as the answers to basic needs that everyone must accomplish. For (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 21) culture is the manner in which “people act and interact in a way that makes sense to them.”

Culture of any specific society is built on elements that an individual member of that culture is acquainted with, inter alia language, norms, expectations, religion, rituals, social standards, attitude and many more.

There are many metaphors to describe the visualization of culture. Some lecturers suggest peeling layer after layer (like an onion) to understand culture, whereas other lecturers describe culture as an iceberg. In order to understand the concept of culture, it is essential to look below the surface, where values, customs, traditions, and beliefs in particular are obscured.

Research has highlighted six different types of cultures:

- material culture
- non-material culture
- corporate culture
- culture of diversity
- foreign culture
- popular culture

For the purpose of this thesis, the author will only focus on foreign culture (national culture) as the most relevant for the thesis' conclusion.

(Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 75) define national culture as “a learned phenomenon as people within any given nation share socializing agents.” These common nation-related factors, such as history, educational system, legal system, and the like, lead to an analogy in behavioral norms, attitudes, and values. National-level attitudes and values can be detected only upon spending significant time in a foreign national culture or as a consequence of intense interaction with members of a foreign culture.

Admittedly, culture might also affect managers' evaluation and leadership of their employees.

National cultures commonly mirror national boundaries. Nevertheless, there are exceptions, such as Switzerland, where people speak different languages and are influenced by the different cultures of the neighboring countries, Germany, Italy, and France.

### **3.2. Cultural Differences / Intercultural Competences**

After understanding what culture means, this section is dedicated to the analysis of culture and a demonstration of the necessity of intercultural competences for an assignee's successful adaptation in a foreign country, which can be described as a recognition of cultural differences and which is described greater detail in the next chapter.

“Even though fast globalization processes flatten cultural differences all over the world, cultural determinants still have a strong impact on international cooperation, value of trade and, in consequence, economic growth.” (Lorenkowicz 2013).

Humans all over the world are facing the same challenges of existence. The only variation is the ways in which these challenges are managed. The observation of the way citizens of different countries differentiate themselves in attitude towards authority relations, decision making, gender relations, leadership behavior admits a variance among miscellaneous cultures.

(Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 75) ascribe that “cultural differences can be sensed and felt through passive observation and direct contact with host nationals.”

Within each culture there are “tremendous variations between individuals, social groups or genders in possible ways of making sense of situations” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 21). This may result in registering what surprises us. As a consequence, a person might excessively recognize the extremes. This behavior is commonly described as stereotyping.

It is important to avoid stereotyping when acknowledging new culture, reflecting that “a country is not a pigeonhole into which all of its citizens neatly fit” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 91).

Academics advise that a certain amount of humility and a sense of humor are needed to discover foreign cultures. It is the “readiness to enter a room in the dark and stumble over unfamiliar furniture until the pain in the shins reminds us of where things are” (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 209).

Differences in behaviors, attitudes, and values on a level of national culture are commonly identified as cultural differences. Intercultural competence is the recognition of those differences. Despite the number and variety of books written about culture differences, the lecturers admit that existing literature about intercultural competences is either more normative than predicated on research, or presented solely from the US perspective.

(Ehliion Language Consultancy 2019) defines intercultural competences as the “ability to communicate effectively across different cultures and to work with people from different cultural backgrounds.”

Merely having an ongoing commitment to learning about new cultures, values and customs can maintain and deepen cultural competences. Thus, such valuable knowledge ensures that individuals prevent any cultural failures that could potentially harm any kind of relationship.

(Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 180) refer to academics who distinguish four aspects of intercultural competences:

- Recognition
- Respect
- Reconciliation
- Realization

Trying to compare oneself against others can result in cross-cultural self-awareness that is an adumbration of the recognition of a foreign culture. When admitting to differences of certain cultures, having respect is imperative for dealing with those cultural differences, based on “attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral orientation toward people that hold diversity of values” (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 186).

For the sake of being a decent reconciler, who inspires as well as listens, the competence of dealing with cultural differences that one is aware of and respects is crucial. After one recognizes, respects, and reconciles the cultural differences, the final intercultural competence is to implement a process of rooting the gained knowledge. Once this is completed, the final stage of realization is accomplished.

“Cultural awareness is understanding states of mind, your own and those of people you meet” (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 280).

Admittedly intercultural competences in today’s world are not unsolicited but an imperative, when observing how rapidly the world of business is changing due to the internalizations of firms and global nomads leaving their country of birth. For the benefit of personal and professional relationships it is undoubtedly important to acquire the necessary intercultural competence when being internationally present.

Every human being is influenced by their own culture with a mental model in mind, and so going beyond one’s own values and principles fearlessly leads to a deepening of one’s intercultural



competence. Thinking about situations in one's own culture might help in understanding observed behaviors in foreign culture that seem to be distinct.

### 3.3. Dimensions of Culture

People all over the world are confronted with the identical three dilemmas - extraordinary relationships to people around them, friends, family, employees, customers, bosses; management of time and aging; and finally, interaction with the natural environment.

When describing cultural differences, the academics (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020) identified a model of seven dimensions of culture that help us understand the distinction in cultures that become noticeable when working with foreign nationals or in foreign country.

In this chapter the author introduces the dimensions, supplemented by tangible examples in the respective country combination.

The following five dimensions have a considerable impact on the way people do business, manage, and react in response to dilemmas:

- Universalism versus particularism (rules versus exceptions)
- Individualism versus communitarianism (the group versus the individual)
- Neutral versus emotional (the degree to which feelings are expressed)
- Specific versus diffuse (the degree of involvement)
- Achievement versus ascription (how status is accorded)

Further dimension specifies the differences in coping with time:

- Sequential versus synchronic (the degree of multitasking competence)

The last dimension ascribes the relation of human beings to the environment:

- Internal versus external control (the degree of control of external factors)

The practitioners present various exercises that will be briefly described in the respective chapter. The results of specific countries are taken as relevant reference for this thesis.

In Attachment 3 the reader can collect some recommendations for the handling of the cultural differences analyzed below.

#### 3.3.1. Universalism versus Particularism

The nature of a universalist is to be more abstract. Switzerland, as a rule-based society, is a great example of universalism culture. Even if there is no traffic, people still wait at the traffic light until the light turns green.

The researchers used exercises that present a dilemma which measures universal and particularist responses.

Example: Your friend is driving a car far too fast and hits a pedestrian (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 45).

33% Japanese and 94% Swiss answered that the friend had no right or some right in requesting you to testify to the lower figure of speed and would then not testify.

For the universalists the obligation to help their friend reduces as the seriousness of the accident grows. Particularists, on the other hand, tend to help the friend more as the severity of the pedestrian's injuries increases.

Example: You write reviews about restaurants. Your friend, who spent all his money in his restaurant business, asked you to eat there and write a positive review. You think that the restaurant is not good. Is your obligation to be "truthful and unbiased"? (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 47)

When asked, 22% of Japanese and 84% of Swiss admitted their obligation to being honest and impartial.

A particularist society is identified through relationships, particularly to the leader. In principle, a higher level of particularism means an enhanced adherence between employer and employee. Particularists' relationships are typically long lasting.

### 3.3.2. Individualism versus Communitarianism

This dimension identifies the conflict of how people relate to each other in terms of difference of what individuals want in contrary to the desires of the group they belong to.

Research has shown that an individualistic society is rather modern culture, while a communitarian society refers to tradition and failure of Communist times.

Example: 23% of Japanese and 62% of Swiss respondents believe that a job is somewhere where one is allowed to work individually (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 67). It is important to add that the approach may vary depending on third parties' requirements.

Individuals can be recognized as being either self- or community oriented; a communitarian culture tends to exhibit multiparty representation, as a method of self-protection against unexpected requests. In a communitarian culture, unaccompanied people in work-related environment are presumed to hold inadequate status.

The decision-making process in an individualistic culture is very short, where one person makes decisions in a short term; it is, however, often followed by latent problems which are due to insufficient preparation time being taken when making the decision.

In a communitarian society, on the other hand, it takes much longer to make and present decisions because the aim is to win everyone over.

(Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 75) refers to the "Japanese "ringi" process, where proposals circulate and are initiated by agreeing participants, is the most famous example of communitarian decision-making, but it can lead to very lengthy delays. "

In an individualistic society, an organization is a means to an end, serving the individual interest of each one. If they cooperate, it is because they have a distinct stake as a group. In a communitarian culture on the other hand, an organization acts as social context which lends meaning and purpose to its members

### 3.3.3. Neutral versus Emotional

Whether an individual shows emotions or is neutral has an impact on the relationship between people and the approach towards each other. The extent to which emotions are shown is the major

difference between cultures. It is important to add that 75 per cent of all communication is non-verbal, presented namely by gestures and body language.

Example: 66% of Japanese and 79% of Swiss people would express their feelings, if they felt upset about something at work (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 83).

A neutral person could be seen as being cold and emotionless, sometimes even with no heart, while on the contrary and to another extreme, an emotional person could be accused of being incoherent and partially out of control.

#### 3.3.4. Specific versus Diffuse

This dimension is about strategies which are used when becoming acquainted with other people. The literature on this topic identifies two discrete strategies: low and high context.

There is a considerable variance among the two countries which are the subject of this thesis. In specific culture, private life and work are strictly separated, which could be similarly reflected in the style of leadership, where line managers distinguish the tasks separating them from other dealings.

Diffuse culture is relationship-oriented, where the members look first at the connections before contemplating each piece of the puzzle, because in a diffuse culture it is important to bind the status of everyone to the organization.

Members of a diffuse culture fear losing face, and it is therefore noticeable that it takes longer to get to the point or to make a decision. The diffuse way of living is common in Japan, where comprehensive dialogues are conducted before a decision is made or changes are implemented.

Example: 45% of Japanese and 83% of Swiss managers do not think that housing is a company's responsibility (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 107).

This specific question was raised by practitioners with reference to the fact that Japanese corporations differentiate between employees with and without family. Those with families profit among others from higher salaries or getting support searching for a house. They are furthermore granted recreation facilities or goods at better prices.

Particularly in Japan, the diffuse culture can also be observed in the purchasing behavior regarding customer products. Japanese prefer to buy local products, admitting that with the purchase they also support economic and social development of their society.

#### 3.3.5. Achievement versus Ascription

Example: 29% of Japanese and 72% of Swiss people would value getting things done even at the expense of personal freedom to live as you feel you should (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 120).

Cultures with an extended achievement status are oriented towards getting things done, ticking the box, with reference to achievement of people, whereas the ascription-oriented cultures tend towards the being rather than the doing, and are focused on e.g., class, age, and gender.

Example: 54% of Japanese and 16% of Swiss agree that respect depends mainly on family background (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 121).

In ascriptive cultures, elderly people are honored and respected due to their age that is a reference to their wisdom. The Japanese especially spend much more time in training and in-house education to guarantee that older employees are wiser for the period they have spent in the company.

Whereas in achievement-oriented cultures on the other hand, an individual has delegated authority for personal judgement and acts as a single authority; in ascription-oriented cultures, the individual members do not have such power to decide without extensive consultation with senior staff. The hierarchy in ascription-oriented cultures is justified by the power to get things done, while in achievement-oriented cultures, on the other hand, the hierarchy is reasoned by skills and contribution to organization's success.

### 3.3.6. Sequential versus Synchronic

How we do business is affected by our sense of time. This is also reflected in the quality of relationships in private as well as in work-related life. In fact, members of synchronic cultures are group-oriented (communitarian - see above), while members of sequential cultures tend to work individually and see relationships as a means to an end.

Example: 58% of Japanese and 91% of Swiss people prefer single-tasking rather than conducting more than one task at the same time (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 152).

In time-controlled cultures, time is a product: it can be purchased, spent, and even wasted. In such cultures, punctuality is a must-have-sense, supported by an on-time public transport system, people wearing watches, and scheduling meetings with a clearly defined start and end time.

Members of synchronic cultures, on the other hand, do not attach great importance to punctuality, which can be observed in their public transportation systems not adhering to a time schedule. Meetings and other events are defined with a clear start date that is, admittedly, not recognized, and with no specified end time.

Research literature shows that it could be difficult to do business with synchronic people, as they might ignore deadlines and tend to be late for appointments.

### 3.3.7. Internal versus External Control

This dimension reflects the attitude of an individual towards nature. While the internal oriented cultures think they have the rights and tools to control nature, cultures following the external control principle, on the contrary, believe that human beings are part of nature and must go along with its regulations. The latter see themselves as debtors to the nutrients.

Some lecturers also call this dimension inner-oriented versus outer-oriented.

Example: 77% of Japanese and 48% of Swiss do not believe it is worth trying to control natural forces, like the weather (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 160) while 21% of Japanese and 51% of Swiss feel that they have control over the directions their lives are taking (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 162).

Outer-oriented culture members prefer to help and support, rather than entering into competition or rivalry against each other.

In Japanese outer-oriented culture, harmony is gained by profiting from another's strength. "Japanese cars are designed to take the energy out of their opponent to their advantage. The non-Japanese cars seem to operate like an American football player. If I am stronger than you, I'll win and be safe. Nevertheless, when it comes to an accident the driver of a Japanese car does not feel

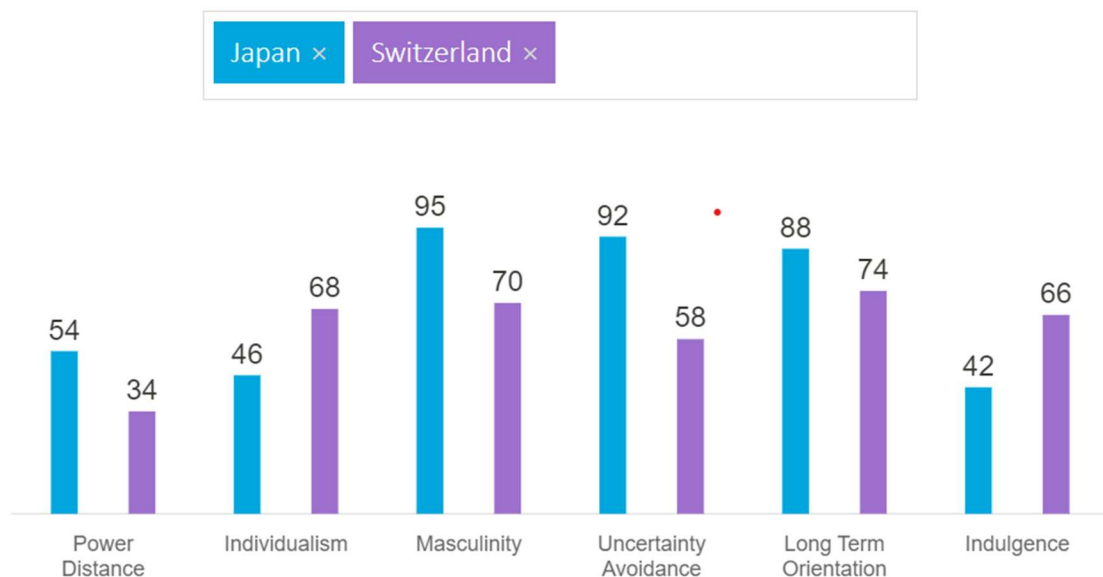
a collision while the driver of non-Japanese car takes it all” (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 171).

### 3.4. Japanese & Swiss Culture

The essential part of this thesis is the comparison of the two cultures of the above countries, highlighting the differences described partially above. The author studied various surveys, reports, and articles. Although numerous researchers and analysts provide comparisons of Asian and European culture, the author will keep the focus on relevant countries’ comparison to prevent any bias and stereotypes, described in Chapter 3.2.

Since in the previous chapter the author referred to (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020), this section is dedicated to Prof Geert Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions, which is introduced below.

“Geert Hofstede’s findings are more relevant today than ever before, as the tangible signs that there may be underlying differences are disappearing in some contexts, while the actual differences are still present” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 79). The global perspective of the six dimensions can be further studied in Attachment 2.



(Hofstede 2022)

Swiss people live their low Power Distance by being independent with equal rights, experiencing decentralized power. They do not appreciate control, but direct and participative communication. Japanese Power Distance, in contrast, manifests itself in a borderline hierarchical society with a slow decision-making process, in many cases caused by missing the one top manager taking the decision.

While Japanese show great examples of a collectivistic society, they have strong patterns of individualism, such as familiar relationship and their sense of privacy and reservedness in comparison to other Asians.

Switzerland’s higher score is represented by the expectation that they will take care of themselves and their relatives only. Employment relationships are agreements based on mutual advantages.

(Callender 2018) admits “the journey from acquaintance to friend can be a long one with a reserved Swiss person but once that transition is made, the relationship is highly valued.”

Significant differences can certainly be recognized in the dimension of Masculinity. Japanese culture is one of the most masculine in the world; this is nevertheless difficult to recognize due to their collectivistic way of life. Masculinity is obvious in the Japanese preference of competition between groups. Another recognizable sign of Masculinity is the Japanese sense of workaholicism. Masculinity in the Swiss population can be recognized by their decisive attitude with an emphasis on equality, competition, and performance.

There is a considerable variance among the dimensions of Uncertainty Avoidance. While Swiss people are led by rules such as time is money, having precision and punctuality as a norm, the Japanese, on the other hand, learned to be prepared for any uncertain situation, experiencing for hundreds of years the power of nature. Their hunger for absolute perfectionism leads in business life to slow decision-making processes, accompanied by detailed facts and figures. "In Japan anything you do is prescribed for maximum predictability" (Hofstede 2022).

Observing the dimension of Long-Term Orientation, the author sees similarities in behavior of both Japanese and Swiss people. Nevertheless, the Swiss people are more pragmatic, adapting traditions smoothly to changed conditions. The Japanese, on the other hand, live their lives described by virtues and practical good examples. In a business environment, the main difference can be observed in investment planning with the aim of stable and steady growth.

Meaningful differences can be observed in the Indulgence dimension. The Swiss value their leisure time, have fun, and desire to realize their wishes for the purpose of joy in their lives. The Japanese, on the other hand, do not emphasize leisure time and exhibit a high level of control of their desires.

"Swiss culture revolves around highly active and healthy people, politely pursuing, in a timely manner the most quintessential elements of life. To join in, it's quite simple. Turn off your television, don't potter around aimlessly in the garden." (Packimpex 2015)

Various academics acknowledge that the main difference lies in the length of decision making. While the Swiss tend to be more direct, the Japanese prefer to discuss topics for a longer time.

Facial expressions have been pointed out as another phenomenon that are distinct between the two cultures. Observing diverse emotions of the Swiss compared to the Japanese unwillingness to express emotions corroborates the difference of expressive manner. Similar attitudes have been recognized by the observance of their respective body languages.

### **3.5. Cross-cultural Training**

Recognizing foreign culture alone does not lead to understanding, accepting, and respecting foreign cultures.

In this chapter the author briefly analyzes this medium that helps to gain knowledge about cultural differences, which is essential for successfully performing in multiple countries. It must be said, however, that studying cultural differences in private and professional surroundings is not as challenging as putting the knowledge gained from studying these differences into actual practice.

In order to successfully adapt to a foreign country, as pointed-out in Chapter 2.3.1. the lecturers refer to cross-cultural training as an indispensable instrument for gaining intercultural competence. Researchers also recognize cross-cultural training as "the best way to explore differences that you experience to better understand the values-based, cross-national roots" (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 97).

"Cross-cultural training is defined as the educative processes used to improve intercultural learning via the development of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral competences needed for successful

interaction in diverse cultures” (Bonache, Brewster und Froese 2021, 42). He describes two possible orientations of cross-cultural training. The first he sees in a focus on a general notion of culture in general, while the second orientation focuses on a specific culture.

Presently there are various types of cross-cultural training, including online sessions, cultural coaching, and cross-cultural training in small groups.

The goal of cross-cultural training is not only to assist individuals to behave in a suitable manner in a foreign culture, but more specifically to identify appropriate ways of performing their tasks with people of a particular culture or in a distinct country.

Cross-cultural training attempts to “help individuals develop methods for coping with the uncertainty when working with people from different cultures or in foreign countries” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 149). The knowledge gained as a result of this training can also be availed for shaping the expectations of an individual’s cross-cultural experiences and interactions.

For international assignees, the most basic cross-cultural training is the pre-departure cross-cultural orientation, with the instantaneous aim to understand the basics, such as currency and public transport. This short introduction to a foreign culture could help the individuals to orientate themselves more efficiently in their private and professional lives in a foreign country. “Traditional cross-cultural training programmes are normally given about a months before departure” (Selmer 2000, 51), but in general their duration is typically too short to gain any fundamentals of a foreign culture and its norms.

A short trip to the host country can be added as constituent of the pre-departure cross-cultural orientation, as highlighted in Chapter 2.3.1.

As already stated earlier, cross-cultural training can be maintained further after mobilization to the host country. It could be pursued by an external provider or by a designated mentor. The latter not only introduces the national culture but is also able to provide insights into the corporate culture in the host country.

Interaction with people from foreign cultures before departure can be recognized as both formal and informal cross-cultural training that substantially contributes to further development of intercultural competences.

For (Trompenaars und Hampden-Turner 2020, 280) the goal of cross-cultural training must be “to alert people to the fact that they are constantly involved in a process of assigning meaning to the actions and objects they observe.” Other researchers see the aim of a cross-cultural training in gaining cultural agility, described as the ability to “quickly, comfortably, and effectively work in different countries and with people from diverse cultures” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 73). Profound acknowledgement and acceptance of the differences between our own and foreign culture is fundamental for cultural agility.

For the readers’ convenience the author attaches an example of cross-cultural training dedicated to managing and negotiating competences across Swiss and Japanese culture (Attachment 4 & 5).

### **3.6. Chapter Summary**

Whilst every human being is an individual, they are nevertheless affected by family, rules, habits, system, and norms known from their own culture. Based on assumptions, we expect people to act in a similar way that is familiar to us. The fact that everyone eats hamburgers does not answer the question of what it means to different cultures.

In the literature there is evidence of the presumption that ongoing high levels of internalization will lead to a common global culture. This might potentially result from the mixture of national cultures all over the world. Nevertheless, the strong presence and importance of national culture will maintain the roots of each nation and should therefore be acknowledged and respected. Globalization requires a deeper awareness of cultural patterns.

In current times, globalization is forcing multinational organizations to think more in now and today, but the sense of time is still a relevant cultural difference that must be considered.

In addition, the lecturers admit that the cultural difference between indirect and direct communication could be one of the most challenging in the international context. As illustrated in this chapter, the acknowledgement of cultural differences is undoubtedly essential for adequate behavior in a multinational field. Defining the culture, its dimensions and differences lead to recognition and respect of foreign culture. The path is not to learn the do's and don't's, but rather the ability "to learn and store collected bits of cultural knowledge into cultural framework and apply the framework to a new (and unfamiliar) culture" (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 80).

As illustrated above, cross-cultural training and its variations can help individuals to understand and acknowledge the facets of foreign culture better, and to make the individual prepared for potential-shock. This instrument is therefore undoubtedly an essential element in the assignment preparation phase. Nevertheless, research clearly shows that assignees are regularly seconded all over the world without any cross-cultural training.

"Examining consequences of insufficient cross-cultural understanding in international business, research has revealed that unscheduled early return rates are significant, and that each such event incurs substantial direct and indirect costs" (Selmer 2000, 51) .

#### **4. Results of survey**

In order to complete her research, the author elaborated on various surveys distributed to different groups of recipients as another method of information gathering.

The participants of the main survey were active (2 - male, single and with family) and repatriated assignees (4 - female, male, single and with family) from Japan to Switzerland on a long-term basis. The target group consisted of managers seconded as top management members for the company's strategic purposes, as well as of international assignees seconded for development purposes.

The purpose of the survey was to interpret personal experiences regarding the preparation of the assignment and any cultural preparedness, along with the quality of adaption in the host country (pointing further to the cultural differences of the corresponding countries).

Thus, the author posed the following purposeful questions to understand the assignee's individual interpretation:

- What were the steps of preparation phase?
- How did you prepare for international assignments?
- When did you feel integrated in society and why?
- What, who did help feeling you integrated (Japanese assistant based in Switzerland, co-workers, other Japanese assignees, Japanese community, Japanese school)?
- Where do you see main differences between JAP (Asia) and CH (Europe)?
- Do you feel differences (personal, cultural, experience) after your repatriation (please explain)?



Two respondents reported that they were informed about the upcoming assignment in an unofficial matter approximately twelve months before the effective start date. Despite the admitted preparation phase no interviewee mentioned intercultural training being offered as part of pre-departure support. This finding is mirrored in the time-line chart (Attachment 6) provided by a participant.

Out of six respondents, two participants acknowledged they had no need for preparation due to their previous international experience: either due to their daily work in an international environment or justified by previous international assignment.

Immigration, relocation, accommodation, and schooling support were confirmed by all survey participants as part of the preparation phase.

Depending on the assignees' familial status, the level of integrity in the host country varied. Japanese assignees seconded to Switzerland with their families felt integrated much sooner than single assignees. The author recognizes a connection to the place of living during the assignment for this category of assignees. Assignees accompanied by their spouses and dependents live within the local Japanese community and are ultimately established as a consequence of the presence of the Japanese school. Nevertheless, living in the host country surrounded by the home country culture does not support the integration in the host country.

“Other Japanese assignees, Japanese community, Japanese school are undoubtedly important for me to get information and release stress. However, if Japanese staffs always get together and speak in Japanese, it will prevent us from being integrated smoothly in local community.”

Single assignees, on the contrary, admitted that the integration process took longer, as their social contacts consisted of co-workers. The feedbacks clearly confirmed the author's findings about the Swiss culture, as elaborated in Chapters 3.3. and 3.4.

All participants acknowledged that their local Japanese assistance was the strongest pillar of their integration process, as this person represented an important interface between the home and host country.

Another pillar frequently identified by the questioned assignees were local co-workers being supportive and friendly to the new international colleagues. “When it comes to daily life at the office, I felt integrated when my colleagues treated me equally without special consideration just because I am Japanese and assigned from parent company:”

According to the feedback, those two factors were recognized as the most important for the integration process.

When it comes to cultural differences observed by the interviewees, the replies correspond to the findings presented in Chapters 3.3. and 3.4.

One assignee reflected on the main difference in direct vs. indirect communication, admitting that Japanese people are “reluctant to express their opinion”. Another participant reported that the main difference was Switzerland being more systematic than Japan. Further feedback referred to the risk-friendly attitude of the Swiss people. The respondent felt that “everyone is very aggressive with fact action”. The assignee identified this behavior as “too optimistic” and that Swiss people should “think about business risk”. A similar reply was provided by another participant who observed that “decision-making speed and establishing friendly relations being generally slow in Japan compared to Switzerland”. For the interviewee, this is caused by the conservative mentality of the Japanese.

Repatriated assignees acknowledged a positive impact on their personality after their assignment to Switzerland. All of them reported feeling more confident with foreign business partners, with brighter views on topics of everyday life and business. One respondent observed feeling stronger in expressing their own opinion in meetings after repatriation from Switzerland. Nevertheless, one participant admitted the “need to readjust to Japanese working culture after the repatriation”.

In addition, the author interviewed a Japanese peer who is the home country responsible for assigning Japanese personnel from the HR perspective.

The result of the survey stated that the selection is made by the head of department without involvement from the HR department. This outcome corresponded with the author’s summary in Chapter 2.3.1.

The criteria for decision consist of an employee’s desire for being seconded, English language capability, previous work experience and finally the company’s career expectations of the person.

The respondent acknowledged two phases of the preparation phase - 3-6 months before the assignment and 1-3 months before the assignment. While during the first phase the general, assignment-related documents were prepared for all involved parties (among others for immigration authorities in the host country), the second phase was more person-related and consisted of medical examinations, personal briefings and moving arrangements. The interviewee did not mention any cross-cultural or any kind of other training as part of the preparation phase.

Regular contact between home HR and assignee was not confirmed, apart from the annual salary review process.

The survey shall be viewed as exploratory only; there is no guarantee that those interviews are representative of the population of Japanese assignees. Nevertheless, the perspective of the interviewees which is presented, combined with the study of the theory in previous chapters, still provides useful directions.

Furthermore, for the purpose of obtaining a complete point of view from all perspectives, the author also interviewed a Swiss person assigned to Japan. Despite the fact that this particular transfer situation is not the subject of this thesis, it gives rise to an interesting hint and further personal interpretation of the author’s findings about culture differences in Chapter 3.3. and 3.4. (the result of the survey can be found in Attachment 7).

## **5. Conclusion**

“The rules of good business are not the same everywhere. What works in one culture may have little effect or even negative consequences in another cultural context” (Selmer 2000, 50).

The framework of this thesis was built together with two contextual foundational topics: culture and its influence on international assignment.

While the first part of this paper aims to get insights on international assignments, the second part of this thesis illustrates the cultural aspect, pointing out the differences in national cultures which the reader might face in international environments.

The aim of the thesis was to validate the statement that “preparation for expatriation is of utmost importance” (Global Expansion 2020). Nevertheless, it is not surprising that the results of various analyses pointed out the challenges facing HR departments, who seem to be in a rush to have the assignment agreed, but once the agreement is signed, it is almost impossible to squeeze preparation or training into a very busy few weeks prior the mobilization. On the other hand, it is

also surprising to note the lack of interest of assignees and their accompanying families in cross-cultural training, despite the fact that this training is provided by the company, even though “researchers in 1990s measured effectiveness of cross-cultural training having positive effect” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 184). According to further sources cross-cultural training is crucial for organizations to minimize assignments’ failures.

The selection of the right candidate for international assignments must be a team effort of line management and HR to select the ideal match for both employee and the company. Failure at this early stage of preparation may lead to frustration on the employee’s side caused by improper self-assessment, and to costly consequences for the company on the other hand when an assignee has to be replaced.

“In addition to comprehensive self-selection and selection programs, success in international assignments may be facilitated through cross-cultural training and language training” (Caligiuri, Lepak und Bonache 2010, 149).

The purpose of the preparation for international assignments is to provide the assignee with the necessary puzzle pieces to have the complete picture of realistic expectations and potential risks. Admittedly (according to literature) the preparation phase is not seen as necessary by senior managers and CEOs, who do not see the need for careful preparation. They assume that “good management is good worldwide” (Reiche, Harzing und Tenzer 2019, 389). From their perspective, unfortunately, a place of work does not play a role in an assignee’s performance.

It is, however, evidenced in research from both the 1990s and twenty years later in the 2010s that careful preparation (consisting among others of cross-cultural training) has a substantial impact on an assignee’s adaption and adjustability as well as performance at work.

The preparation should include (besides training and workshops) the set-up of the framework, including among others a remuneration package as well as a development program and administrative support.

With reference to various academics and researches the author analyzed the culture and its impact on international assignments. As both fields might not be familiar to future assignees, it is crucial to deepen their knowledge of both accordingly. The pre-departure period is a time of mixed emotions. The company should therefore make the assignee aware of the fact that the adaptation phase is not easy. The assignee should also be mindful of the problems that may arise.

According to the author (and endorsed by lecturers and academics), it is the fact that the time prior to the international assignment is the most important phase of the assignment circle, referring to various researches investigating the main reasons for expatriates’ failures. Cross-cultural adjustment, training, selection, and family problems have been identified as causes of an early end of international assignments. Additionally, the lack of repatriation preparation may lead to demotivation, because the assignee does not know what will happen after the return to the home country. Thus, a repatriation plan must be in place before the effective start date of an assignment.

An assignment is a big investment for both the employee and the company. Expatriate failure might therefore have a major impact for both employee and company. The employee may suffer from doubts leading to lack of performance and loss of respect in the home country, while the company may face reputational issues internally as well as externally. Aside from the negative cost impact and negative return on investment, the company could have difficulties encouraging other employees to participate in international assignment.

In conclusion, this thesis consolidates the theoretical facts supported by various analyses of researches, supported by a practical survey concluding that the preparation of international

assignment is a key for success during the assignment that is to be measured from the perspective of the employee and the company.

Well-prepared and well-qualified assignees work more efficiently with fewer mistakes, while recognizing the cultural differences and being aware of hiccups that may, and most probably will, occur during all phases of an international assignment.

Careful preparation of the assignment supports a more rapid adjustment in the host location for the whole family, that is seen as a source of support as well as one of concern. Thus, it is undoubtedly crucial to involve the family members in the assignment preparation process, irrespective of their mobilization or stay in the home country. The better the assignee and the family have been prepared for the international assignment, the more realistic the expectations are, and the easier the adaption will be, the latter being a key factor for a successful assignment.

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## **7. Attachments**

- Attachment 1-Abbreviations
- Attachment 2-Dimensions of World
- Attachment 3-Tipps for Treat of Cultural Differences
- Attachment 4-Managing Across Cultures-Japan-Switzerland
- Attachment 5-Negotiating Across Cultures-Japan-Switzerland
- Attachment 6-Assignment Preparation Flowchart
- Attachment 7-Survey Assignee From Switzerland to Japan
- Attachment 8-Checklist of Activities and Support for the Process of Assignment

## **Attachment 1-Abbreviations**

HQ-Headquarters

HCN-Host country nationals

MNC-Multinational company

PCN-Parent country nationals

TCN-Third country nationals

BT-Business traveler

IA-International assignment

LTA-long-term assignment

STA-short-term assignment

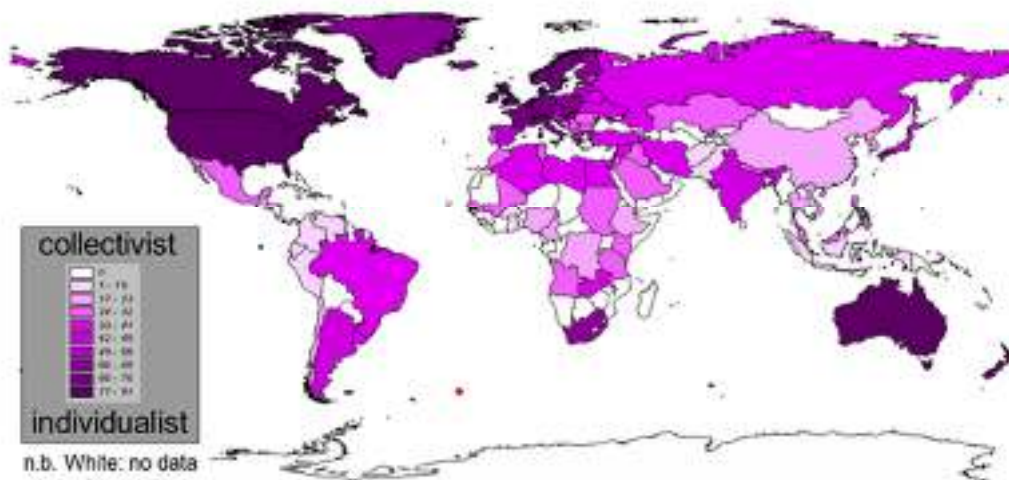
CQ-Cultural intelligence

ROI-Return on investment

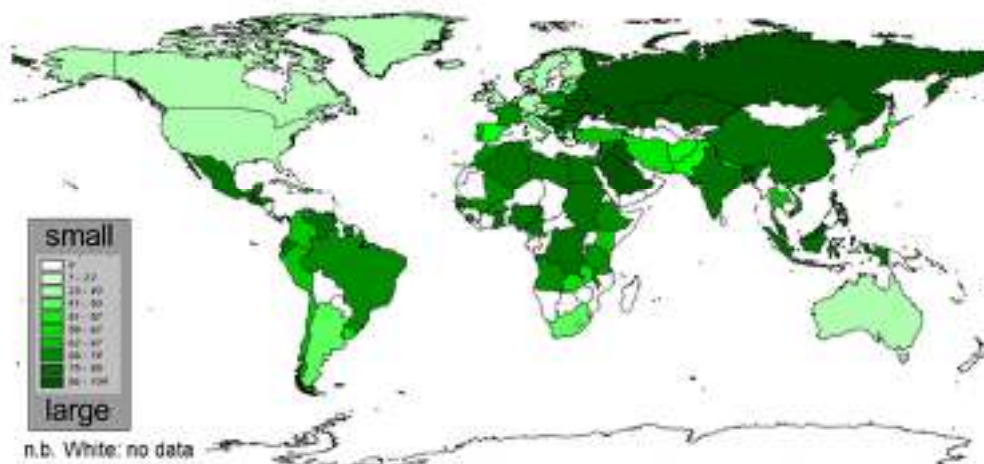
## Attachment 2-Dimension Maps of the World

[The 6 dimensions model of national culture by Geert Hofstede](#)

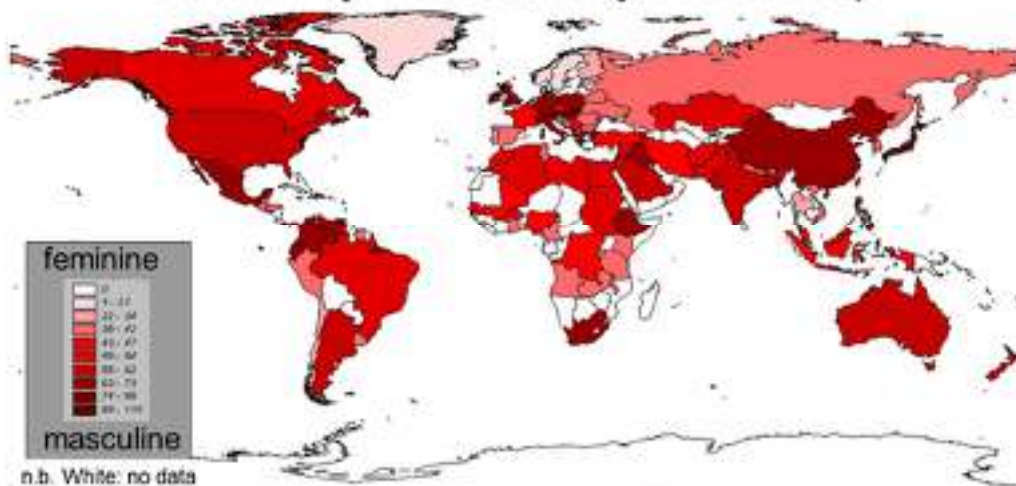
### Collectivism – Individualism World map



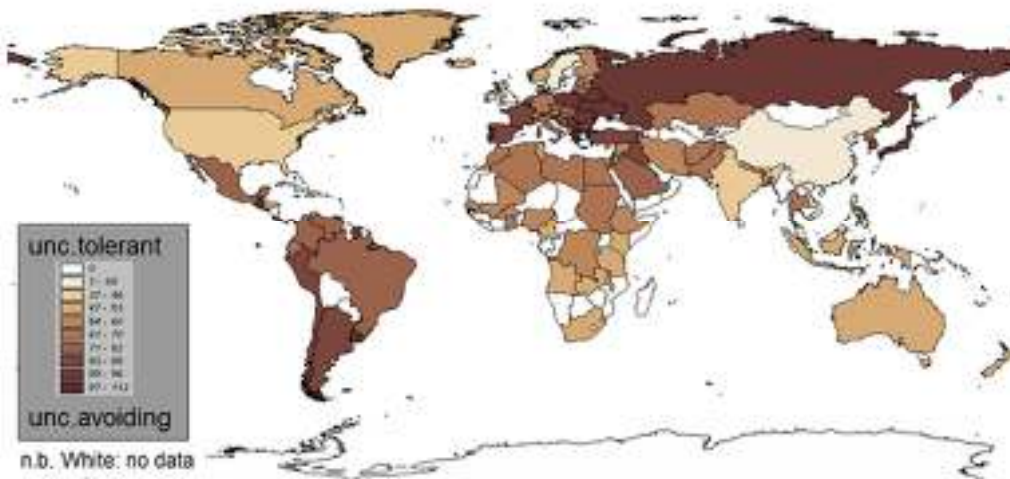
### Power Distance World map



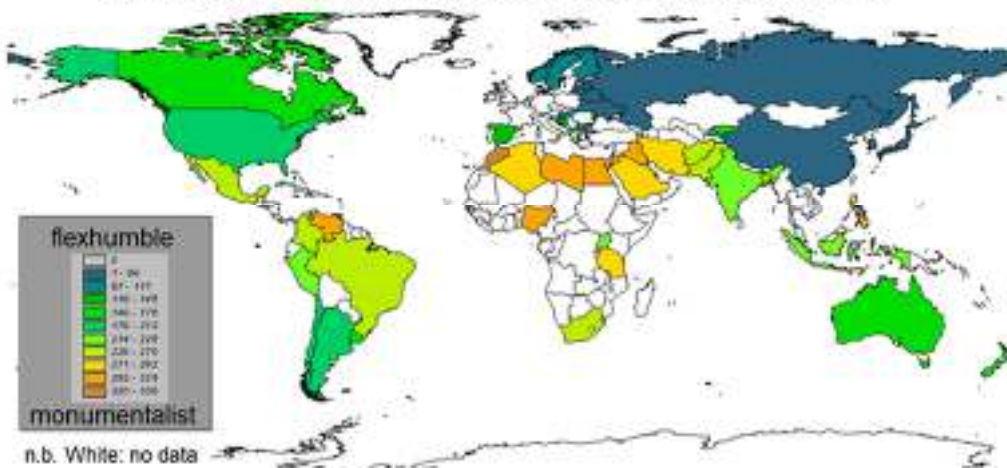
### Femininity - Masculinity World map



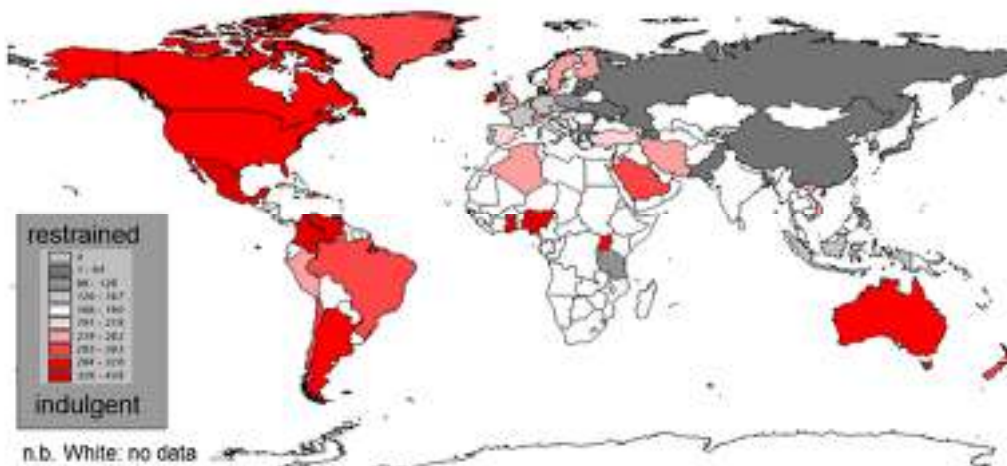
## Uncertainty Avoidance World map



## Short-term orientation (Monumentalism) – Long-term orientation (Flexhumility) World map (based on WVS)



## Indulgence - Restraint World map (based on WVS)





### **Attachment 3-Tipps for Treat of Cultural Differences**

#### **Culture differences-tips from Fons Trompenaars & Charles Hampden-Turner (Riding the Wave of Culture)**

P61

#### **Recognizing the Differences**

##### **Universalist**

Focus is more on rules than on relationship.

Legal contracts are readily drawn up.

A trustworthy person is the one who honors his changing or her word or contract.

There is only one truth or reality, that which has been agreed to.

A deal is a deal.

#### **Tips for Reconciliation**

##### **Particularists doing business with Universalists**

Be prepared for "rational," "professional" arguments acquiescence.

Do not take impersonal, "get down to business" attitudes as rude.

Carefully prepare the legal ground with a lawyer if in doubts.

#### **Differences in Managing and Being Managed**

##### **Universalists**

Strive for consistency and uniform procedures.

Institute formal ways of changing the way business is conducted.

Modify the system so that the system will not modify you.

Signal changes publicly.

P 81

#### **Recognizing the Differences**

##### **Individualist**

More frequent use of "I" form.

Decisions made on the spot by representative.

People ideally achieve alone and assume personal responsibility.

Vacations taken in pairs, even alone.

#### **Tips for Reconciliation**

##### **Communitarianism doing business with Individualist**

Prepare for quick decisions and sudden offers not referred to HQ.

Negotiator can commit those who sent him or her and is very reluctant to go back on an undertaking.

##### **Particularist**

Focus is more on relationship than on rules.

Legal contracts are readily modified.

A trustworthy person is the one who honors mutualities.

There are several perspectives on reality relative to each participant.

Relationships evolve.

##### **Universalists doing business with Particularists**

Be prepared for personal "meandering" or "irrelevancies and presentations that push for your that do not seem to be going anywhere.

Do not take persona, "get to know you" attitudes as small talk.

Carefully consider the personal implications legal of your "safeguards".

##### **Particularists**

Build informal networks and create private understanding.

Try to alter informally accustomed patterns of activity.

Modify relations with you, so that you will modify the system.

Pull levers privately.

##### **Communitarianism**

More frequent use of "we" form.

Decisions referred back to organization by delegate.

People ideally achieve in groups that assume joint responsibility.

Vacations in organized groups or with extended family.

##### **Individualist doing business with Communitarianism**

Show patience for time taken to consent and to consult.

Negotiator can only agree tentatively and may withdraw an undertaking after consulting with superiors.

The toughest negotiations were probably already done within the organization while preparing for the meeting. You have a tough job selling them the solution to this meeting.

Conducting business alone means that this person is respected by his or her company and has and has its esteem.

The aim is to make a quick deal.

### **Differences in Managing and Being Managed Individualist**

Try to adjust individual needs to organizational needs.

Introduce methods of individual incentives like pay-for-performance,

Expect job turnover and mobility to be high.

Seek out high performers, heroes, and champions for special praise.

P 93

### **Recognizing the Differences Neutral Orientation**

Do not reveal what they are thinking or feeling.

May (accidentally) reveal tension in face and posture.

Emotions often dammed up will occasionally explode.

Cool and self-possessed conduct is admired.

### **Affectively oriented people doing business with neutrally oriented people**

Ask for time-outs from meetings and negotiations where you can patch each other up and rest between games of poker with the "impassive ones."

Put as much as you can on paper beforehand.

Their lack of emotional tone does not mean they are disinterested or bored, only that they do not like to show their hand.

The entire negotiation is typically focused on the object or proposition being discussed, not so much on you as persons.

### **Differences in Managing and Being Managed Neutral Orientation**

Avoid warm, expressive, or enthusiastic behavior. This is interpreted as lack of control over their feelings and inconsistent with high status.

If you prepare extensively beforehand, you will find easier to "stick to the point," that is, neutral topics being discussed.

Look for subtle indications that the person is pleased or angry and amplify their importance.

The toughest negotiations are with the communitarians you face. You must somehow persuade them to cede points that the multiple interests in your company demand.

Conducting business when surrounded by helpers means that this person has high status in his or her company.

The aim is to build lasting relationships.

### **Communitarianism**

Seek to integrate personality with authority within the group.

Give attention to "esprit de corps", morale and cohesiveness.

Have low job turnover and mobility.

Extol the whole group and avoid showing favoritism.

Hold up superordinate goals for all to meet.

### **Affective Orientation**

Reveal thoughts and feelings verbally and nonverbally.

Transparency and expressiveness release tension.

Emotions flow easily, effusively, vehemently, and without inhibition.

Heated, vital, animated expressions are admired.

### **Neutrally oriented people doing business with affectively oriented people**

Do not put off your stride when they create scenes and get histrionic; take time-outs for sober reflection and hard assessments.

When they are expressing goodwill, respond warmly.

Their enthusiasm, readiness, to agree, or vehement disagreement does not mean that they have made up their minds.

The entire negotiation is typically focused on you as persons, not so much on the object or proposition being discussed.

### **Affective Orientation**

Avoid detached, ambiguous, and cool demeanor. This will be interpreted as negative evaluation, as disdain, dislike, and social distance. You are excluding them from "the family".

If you discover whose work, energy, and enthusiasm has been invested in which projects, you are more likely to appreciate tenacious positions.

Tolerate great "surfeits" of emotionality without getting intimidated or coerced and moderate their importance.

P 115

### **Recognizing the Differences**

#### **Specific Orientation**

Direct, to the point, purposeful in relating.

Precise, blunt, definitive, and transparent.

Principles and consistent moral stand independent of the person being addressed.

#### **Diffusely oriented people doing business with specifically oriented people**

Study the objectives, principles, and numerical targets of the specific organization with which you are dealing.

Be quick, to the point, and efficient.

Structure the meeting with time, intervals, and agendas.

Do not use titles or acknowledge skills that are irrelevant to the issue being discussed.

Do not be offended by confrontations; they are usually not personal.

### **Differences in Managing and Being Managed**

#### **Specifically oriented people**

Management is the realization of objectives and standards with rewards attached.

Private and business agendas are kept separate from each other.

Conflicts of interest are frowned upon.

Clear, precise, and detailed instructions are seen as assuring better compliance, or allowing employees to dissent in clear terms.

Begin reports with an executive summary.

P 133

### **Recognizing the Differences**

#### **Achievement Orientation**

Use of titles only when relevant to the competence you bring to the task.

Respect for superiors in hierarchy is based on how effectively they perform their job and how adequate their expertise is.

Most senior managers are of varying age and gender and have shown proficiency in specific job.

### **Tips for Reconciliation**

#### **Ascription-oriented people doing business with achievement-oriented people**

Make sure your negotiation team has enough data, technical advisors, and knowledgeable people to convince the other company that the project, jointly pursued, will work.

Respect the expertise and information of your counterparts even if you suspect they are short of influence back home.

#### **Diffuse Orientation**

Indirect, circuitous, seemingly "aimless" forms of relating.

Evasive, tactful, ambiguous, even opaque.

Highly situational morality depending upon the person and context encountered.

#### **Specifically oriented people doing business with diffusely oriented people**

Study the history, background, and future vision of the diffuse organization with which you expect to do business.

Take time and remember there is more than one way to skin a cat.

Let the meeting flow, occasionally nudging its process.

Respect a person's title, age, background, and connections, whatever issue is being discussed.

Do not get impatient when people are indirect or circuitous.

#### **Diffusely oriented people**

Management is continuously improving processes by which quality improves.

Private and business issues interpenetrate.

Consider an employee's whole situation before you judge

Ambiguous and vague instructions are seen as allowing subtle and responsive interpretations through which employees can exercise personal judgement.

End reports with a concluding overview.

### **Ascription Orientation**

Extensive use of titles, especially when they clarify your status in the organization.

Respect for superior in hierarchy is seen as a measure of your commitment to the organization and its mission.

Most senior managers are male, middle-aged, and qualified by their background.

#### **Achievement-oriented people doing business with ascription-oriented people**

In order to convince the other company that you consider this negotiation important, make sure your negotiation team consists of enough older, senior officials, as well as others with formal titles.

Respect the status and influence of your counterparts, even if you suspect they lack experience. Do not make them feel foolish.

Use the title that reflects how competent you are as an individual.

Do not underestimate the need of your counterparts to do better or do more that is expected.  
To challenge is to motivate.

### **Differences in Managing and Being Managed**

#### **Achievement-oriented people**

Respect for a manager is based on knowledge and skills.

Management by objectives and pay-for-performance are effective tools.

Decisions are challenged on technical and functional grounds.

P 174

### **Recognizing the Differences**

#### **Internal Orientation**

Often dominating attitude bordering on aggressiveness toward the environment.

Conflict and resistance mean that you have convictions.

Focus is on self, function, own group, and own organization.

Uncomfortable when environment seems "out of control" or changeable.

#### **Tips for Reconciliation**

#### **Internally oriented people doing business with Internally oriented people**

Playing "hardball" is legitimate to test the resilience of an opponent.

It is most important to "win your objective".

Win some, lose some.

### **Differences in Managing and Being Managed**

#### **Internally oriented people**

Get agreement on and ownership of clear objectives.

Make sure that tangible goals are clearly linked to tangible rewards.

Discuss disagreements and conflicts openly; these show that everyone is determined.

Management by objectives works if everyone is genuinely committed to directing themselves toward shared objectives and if these persist.

Use the title that reflects your degree or influence in your

Do not underestimate the need of your counterparts to make their ascription come true.  
To challenge is to subvert.

#### **Ascription-oriented people**

Respect for a manager is based on seniority.

Management by objectives and pay-for-performance are less effective than direct rewards from the manager.

Decisions are only challenged by people with higher

#### **External Orientation**

Often flexible attitude, willing to compromise and keep the peace.

Harmony and responsiveness, that is, sensibility.

Focus on "other," that is customer, partner, colleague.

Comfortable with waves, shifts, cycles, if these are "natural."

#### **Internally oriented people doing business with externally oriented people**

Softness, persistence, politeness, and long, long patience will get rewarded.

It is most important to "maintain your relationship".

Win together, lose apart.

#### **Internally oriented people**

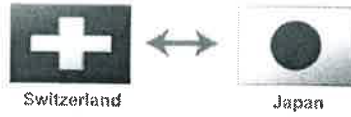
Achieve congruence among various people's goals.

Try to reinforce the current directions and facilitate the work of employees.

Give people time and opportunity to quietly work through conflicts; these are distressing.

Management by environments works if everyone is genuinely committed to adapting themselves to fit external demands as these shift.

## Managing Across Cultures



This feature enables you to compare and contrast critical management differences between national cultures and identify key differences in processes and practices.

Disclaimer: The information in Managing Across Cultures is general in nature and is intended only as a starting point. It is incumbent on the reader to be open and receptive to the particular preferences of each individual he/she works with regardless of their nationality.

## Characteristics of a good manager

### Switzerland

In a task-driven and productivity-focused society, Swiss managers are expected to be particularly qualified for the job. Managers should know the job well from a technical point of view to be able to provide the expected quality of product or service. Degrees and training are viewed as important, combined with a pragmatic way of applying knowledge.

### Japan

A Japanese manager is expected to be an excellent and skilled worker, to provide a good example, and to help guide, support and help employees. A good manager should also protect and defend his or her subordinates if they make a mistake or miss a deadline and should be a good coordinator and a good listener.

## Loyalty

### Switzerland

The typical Swiss management tradition was one of deep commitment and employee loyalty toward their employer, in return for excellent social benefits and often life-long employment. The Swiss workforce used to be quite protected from outside competition and therefore had a fair amount of negotiating power. Globalization and the free movement of persons within the EU have put an end to this "golden era." Today's work market has become much more competitive, and employers offer fewer guarantees.

### Japan

Having a relationship of trust and loyalty between managers and subordinates is important in Japan. However, the establishment of loyalty is not as important for younger employees, who tend to have less loyalty to their companies or even their managers. Many younger employees say that they are unwilling to sacrifice their personal time for work in order to build up their reputation as a loyal employee.

## Hiring

### Switzerland

When applying for a position in Switzerland, one should try to be truthful and not overconfident. Keep in mind that as one aspect of their collectivist attitude, Swiss in general are rather modest and understated and do not like braggarts. Previous work experience of the candidate is very important, since Swiss tend to hire those who have proven they can do the job, rather than on the basis of overall potential.

### Japan

It is common for graduating students to actively contact companies that they aim to enter and take up internship opportunities or do pre-interviews to win an informal offer from the company before they graduate. Once they are hired, the employees are placed by HR into various departments based on the company's needs but also taking into account the students' requests. Traditionally, new employees spend at least a few years training in the various positions in the company.

## Motivation

### Switzerland

Financial remuneration along with career promotion is the best way to motivate an employee. However, other, more indirect, ways are often used, like social activities, career development trainings, etc. Group achievement should be recognized but translated into individual rewards.

### Japan

The Japanese tend to be motivated when they work as a group. However, in contemporary society, personal recognition is becoming more important than ever before. Many Japanese, especially those of the younger generation, believe in salary increases and promotions based on individual recognition and fair performance evaluations.

## Compensation

### Switzerland

Individual rewards are still the main motivating factor for employees, although other types of incentives are used (training in some cases, a company car, social benefits, special events, etc.). Rewards are typically linked to personal performance or budget achievement.

### Japan

While in large corporations that still hold onto the lifetime employment system reward and recognition may be based on working history and age, since the end of the economic boom, many Japanese now expect a more direct reward system, with their salary and bonuses based on their performance.

## Decision Making

### Switzerland

The Swiss linear thinking and order orientations are present in the decision-making process as all elements of the decision are to be checked and proofed before the final decision is made. The focus is likely to be on the feasibility of the project and on its practical implementation, as opposed to the underlying theory and general outcomes.

### Japan

The Japanese tend to make their decisions as a group. Although they have a strong hierarchy orientation, when it comes to decision making, the circular group decision-making system called "ringi" is used. The emphasis is on consensus.

## Source of Authority

### Switzerland

Position on the hierarchy is a source of authority in Switzerland, as are experience, competency and productivity.

### Japan

Although most Japanese companies maintain a strong hierarchical structure, subordinates are still expected to have their own views and a sense of initiative. Japanese managers expect their subordinates to be able to propose their own projects to their managers.

## Delegation

### Switzerland

Since the culture tends to favor control over flexibility, and hierarchy over equality, delegation is most commonly done in a top-down approach and is accompanied by explicit instructions as to content and scope, objectives and budget. Some managers will adopt a more "hands-off" approach that is not necessarily in sync with the general culture.

### Japan

In Japan tasks are delegated by the managers to their subordinates. However, the biggest difference between the Japanese task delegation style and that of many Western cultures is that Japanese employees are expected to proactively pitch their projects to their managers. People believe they should naturally understand what tasks need to be done without clear directions from their managers.

## Information Sharing

### Switzerland

There is still a notion that information is power, so some managers may be reluctant to share information with subordinates to avoid letting go of some power. However, with the ease of modern digital communication, information sharing is more common.

### Japan

Regular meetings and frequent personal contact among team members is common. The information-sharing system, known as Ho-Ren-So (Japanese for Report – Contact – Consult) is widespread in Japan.

## Structuring of Tasks

### Switzerland

Switzerland is a rule-oriented society. This orientation reflects itself in the assignment of tasks as well. Tasks are generally very well defined and are explicitly stated in detailed job profiles and job descriptions. Swiss employees are usually hired to fill a specific function and are therefore unlikely to challenge or question the task structure.

### Japan

In Japan, the big decisions are often made by upper management. At the same time, major projects are decided on by groups. The manager's role is not to define and order tasks but rather to manage subordinates to be able to understand the company's vision and proactively plan their own schedules.

## Teams

### Switzerland

The Swiss school system is a very selective one that tends to emphasize responsibility and discipline from an early age, as well as individual achievement. For this reason, Swiss are more individual than collective achievers. However, the participative/collectivist political culture as well as years of military training (for men) offer a contrast to the educational system's style.

### Japan

Japanese value teamwork and the ability to cooperate. Within the team, consensus building is extremely important. The team leader's focus is on creating a harmonious atmosphere for the team. It is important to supervise and advise team members so that they are in tune at all times.

## Timelines

### Switzerland

With fixed and single-focus orientations, adherence to schedules and timelines is in general very strict in Switzerland. At the same time, the Swiss display a rather long-term, future orientation, which means that any project will be carefully planned out in advance, with a concern for giving adequate time allocation to each phase of the project.

### Japan

Deadlines are very strict in Japanese businesses. Once a deadline is set, it is non-negotiable. All team members work together by sacrificing their personal time to meet the deadline. Schedules are detailed, and team members are expected to meet each goal within the project timeline.

## Planning

### Switzerland

Planning generally occurs at the management level and reflects the general control and hierarchical orientations still prevalent in the Swiss business world. Considerable time and energy is devoted to planning and allocating the necessary resources and approving a budget to ensure smooth running and successful completion of projects.

### Japan

The Japanese put great emphasis on planning. Once a task is given to the team, the project manager, in conjunction with the team members, makes a precise schedule with milestones so that everyone will follow the same steps. On the corporate level, the top executives focus on the long-term planning.



## Feedback

### Switzerland

Feedback has changed quite a bit, progressively integrating more participative management practices. As opposed to being simply top-down, feedback nowadays can also be bottom-up, involving the staff in appraising their superiors in a 360° evaluation.

### Japan

In terms of feedback, Japanese managers tend to focus on the areas where employees need to improve. However, managers do not provide precise directions on how employees should improve since this is regarded as the subordinates' job.

## Follow Up

### Switzerland

Follow up is usually carried out within a formal, established reporting structure and is accepted as necessary by both employees and management. Swiss employees are likely to provide accurate, honest accounts on progress or problems.

### Japan

Because teamwork is so prevalent, and because managers and team leaders take on a paternalistic, teacher-like role with their subordinates, there is constant follow up in Japanese companies, so much so that many people from other cultures might call it micro-managing.

## Performance Appraisal

### Switzerland

Appraisals are conducted at specific intervals on an annual, semi-annual, or sometimes, quarterly basis. A variety of practices apply depending on the business's own HR approach. Evaluations are usually directly linked to year-end decisions on compensation and promotion.

### Japan

Many Japanese now use an evaluation system that has a cap for employees' salaries and bonuses. Under this system, managers select only a few individuals within the group who are given better evaluations. But a lot of Japanese managers hesitate to choose only a few members of the group to reward, as it goes against the collective orientation in Japan.

## Conflict Management

### Switzerland

With their instrumental approach, the Swiss are not particularly at ease with emotional outbursts and heated debates. Debate is acceptable, as long as people keep in control of their emotions and do not enter into direct personal confrontation. In a direct confrontation, the Swiss would try to neutralize the conflict by bringing the conversation back to facts and scrutinizing arguments from a rational point of view.

### Japan

Most Japanese do not regard conflict as a danger for their relationships. They often try to take advantage of the conflict in terms of building a firm relationship by overcoming it together. In this sense, when having a conflict, it is a chance to show one's counterpart one's flexibility, patience and willingness to keep continuing the business through collaboration.

## Organizational Structure

### Switzerland

The organizational structure in Switzerland is characterized by vertical administration, clear-cut divisions, ordered hierarchies and central planning.

 Japan

Most Japanese companies still follow a rigid hierarchical pyramid structure based mostly on seniority. In this kind of structure, group-oriented decision-making takes place. A CEO may face difficulty in asserting his or her authority if he or she makes a decision without gaining consensus and cooperation within the organization.

### Job Mobility

 Switzerland

Swiss employees are competing with other qualified Europeans in the labor market, and the overall effect is one of increased individualism and competition. Those combined factors have created a great deal of uncertainty among Swiss employees who are confused as to what behavior (loyalty or individualism) will protect them best in their future careers. Many younger people think that a sense of obligation toward one's employer is outdated and that everyone has to fend for himself or herself.

 Japan

Since the 1990s, many companies have been shifting their employment and promotion systems to be based on performance. Under this type of system, the company mostly pays attention to employees' work experience, skills and performance. Meanwhile, there is also the lifetime employment system, which is largely based on an employee's work history and previous position.

### Company Size

 Switzerland

Switzerland is home to many multinational corporations, including several on the Fortune 500 list. However, most of the country's factories are considered relatively small by world standards.

 Japan

Approximately two-thirds of Japanese workers are employed in small- to medium-sized companies.

## Negotiating Across Cultures



This feature enables you to compare and contrast critical negotiating differences between national cultures and identify key differences in processes and practices.

Disclaimer: The information in Negotiating Across Cultures is general in nature and is intended only as a starting point. It is incumbent on the reader to be open and receptive to the particular preferences of each individual he/she works with regardless of their nationality.

## Negotiators

### Switzerland

The status and hierarchical rank of people involved in the negotiation process will be determined by the issue involved. A very senior manager will be sent only if the matter is of great strategic importance. Other matters would be dealt with by the team most directly involved in the project accompanied, if need be, by someone from the legal department or financial department.

### Japan

When the Japanese negotiate, they usually work within a team. Mostly, lower-ranking managers deal with the details and on-going deals. Senior managers often participate in the meetings to supervise the conditions and to show their authority. Although they may speak less during the negotiation, they should not be ignored.

## Negotiating Partners

### Switzerland

Building trust relationships could take time. The Swiss place high value on integrity and honesty and will deal with partners whom they feel they can rely on completely. Introduction by a third party or mutual acquaintance can be a bonus when one begins the relationship, but is by no means a necessity.

### Japan

The Japanese tend to have informal meetings with their counterparts during the initial phases of a negotiation. It is crucial to keep contact with the negotiating team (mostly with a specific point person) and get all possible information on the progress of the discussions. It is essential to build good personal trust with the point person or the entire group.

## Values

### Switzerland

The Swiss place high value on integrity and honesty and will deal with partners whom they feel they can rely on completely.

### Japan

Japanese society is formal and holds onto a strong sense of ethics and etiquette, and therefore it is very important to respect formalities throughout the negotiation process. This begins with the dress code. In terms of introductions, the Japanese handshake tends to be much weaker than in many Western countries, and strong handshakes are sometimes regarded as offensive. Introduction should be initiated by the meeting organizer. Usually, the host starts with formal greetings, and he or she will introduce the members according to hierarchy. The Japanese are generally reserved in comparison with Westerners and use various kinds of subtle, nonverbal language to express their feelings in formal occasions.

## Preparation

### Switzerland

To win over the Swiss in a marketing/sales situation, it is advisable to be very well prepared and to make sure to provide complete information on the product or service being sold.

### Japan

The Japanese tend to put a great deal of emphasis on analyzing their counterpart company's credentials and reputation, and team members' personalities, integrity, sincerity and passions to determine if they are trustworthy. It is common to take a year or even a number of years in this phase to gain the trust from their clients. To avoid this time-consuming process as the first step, people often use a third-party referral or "in-between."

## Protocol

### Switzerland

Punctuality is essential in any negotiating situation. Respect of the timing and showing up just a bit ahead of schedule is the best way of showing that one is a trustworthy business partner. One should expect a certain degree of formality. Building a good relationship is important in the French- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland.

### Japan

Since Japanese society holds onto a strong sense of ethics and etiquette, it is very important to follow formality throughout the negotiation process. The language used during the meeting should be formal in both Japanese and the other foreign language. Typically, jokes and loud laughter are not welcome, unless a more casual style is preferred.

## Structure

### Switzerland

The Swiss linear thinking and order orientations are present in the decision-making process, as all elements of the decision are to be checked and proofed before the final decision is made. The focus is likely to be on the feasibility of the project and on its practical implementation, as opposed to the underlying theory and general outcomes. Once the decision is final, it is really final, and it is unlikely to be changed.

### Japan

Once negotiations have begun, the major subject matter or issues are presented at the negotiation table or in a meeting. However, it is rare for the real negotiation to occur on the spot. Mostly, the Japanese try to bring the issues back to their department or group to discuss with other members.

## Compromise

### Switzerland

Compromise and consensus are considered important values in all areas of life in Switzerland.

### Japan

Especially if the subject matter is sensitive, many Japanese prefer to discuss issues face-to-face or in a more private space. They usually discuss the details within their team and try to gain consensus after the discussions with their counterparts. Once a consensus is made among the team or group, they can move on to the next level. This can take a large amount of time.

## Conflict & Debate

### Switzerland

The Swiss are not particularly at ease with emotional outbursts and heated debates. Controversy is acceptable, as long as people keep in control of their emotions and do not enter into direct personal confrontation. In a direct confrontation, the Swiss would try to neutralize the conflict by bringing the conversation back to facts, figures, and scrutinizing arguments from a rational point of view.

### Japan

The Japanese like neither conflict nor debate in public. However, most Japanese do not regard conflict as a danger to their relationships. They often try to take advantage of the conflict in terms of building a firm relationship by overcoming it together. In this sense, when having a conflict, it is a chance to show flexibility, patience, and willingness to keep continuing the business through collaboration.

## Risk Taking

### Switzerland

The Swiss tend to only take calculated risks. They like guaranteed results and set out a procedure to reach those results. Risk taking is not built into the culture, and the trial-and-error approach is not encouraged by the educational system.

 Japan

The Japanese tend toward risk aversion. To avoid risk, all subject matter is carefully examined and analyzed from various angles by the different members of the team and managers. By having a number of informal meetings, they try to minimize all possible issues that may cause risks in the future.

### Concluding Discussions

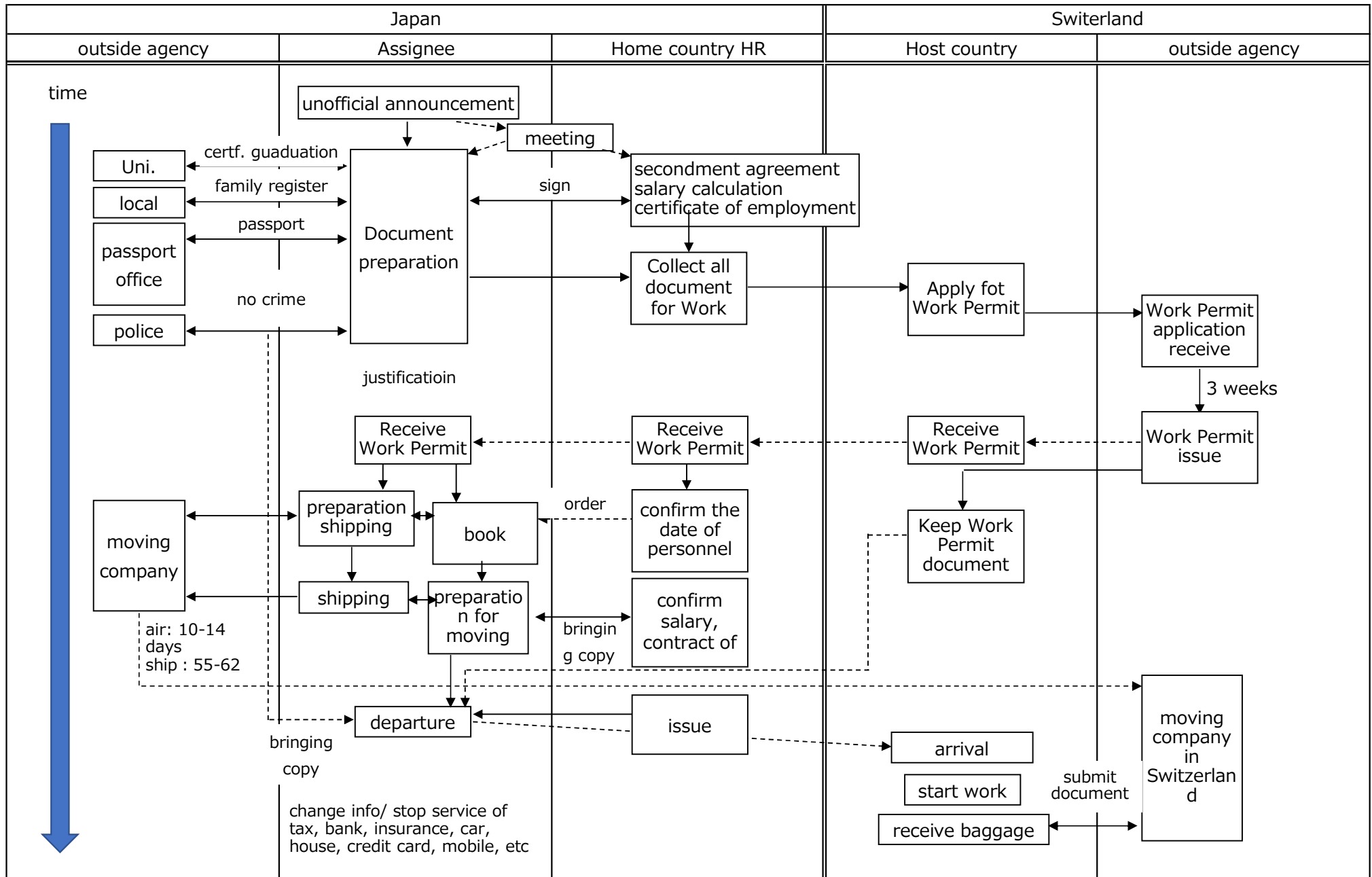
 Switzerland

When decisions involve fewer people, or in some intermediary decisions, a verbal agreement and handshake can be viewed as binding as a written paper. Due to their low-context orientation, Swiss tend to take one's word at face value. Contracts are generally final.

 Japan

It tends to take a long time to make a deal in the Japanese negotiation style. However, the Japanese believe that the final deal is just the start of the business relationship. Traditionally, a contract functions more like an informal or understood agreement rather than one that is legally based. Therefore, the Japanese may feel distaste if their foreign business partners bring attorneys to negotiations.

# Attachment 6-Assignment Preparation Flowchart



## Attachment 7-Survey assignee from Switzerland to Japan (formatted for readers' convenience)

What were the steps of preparation phase (immigration, kick-off process, cultural training, language training)-did you miss anything?

- Language training, check required material list, visa documents, read about the country & culture, private affairs (residency change, military, etc.), packing.
- I missed some clarifications on working time, recording and holidays but everything was answered in due time.

How did you prepare for international assignment?

- My teacher in the language course helped me to prepare also on the cultural side and I read books and watched videos about the culture.
- Most other things are administrative as written above (list not complete).

When did you feel integrated in the society and why?

- I felt more integrated once people started to talk to me more frequently. Japanese people are relatively shy and mostly mind their own business, therefore, they don't easily talk to someone, especially not in English. However, with time more colleagues talk to me more often and also share more insights and opinions. The office is purely Japanese and also in private.
- I made sure to have mainly Japanese friends to further interact, understand and integrate into the culture, instead of gathering with an international/foreign community.

What, who did help feeling you integrated (co-workers, other assignees, European community)?

- Mainly my co-workers and private friends.
- With the latter, I have a chance to ask more open questions and get honest opinions.

Where do you see main differences between JAP (Asia) and CH (Europe)?

- The Japanese have an incredibly controlled and respectful way of interacting with each other. They speak and act as a part of a group and/or community, barely only for themselves.
- On the other hand, this and the strict hierarchy leave less space for private (and honest) opinions.
- They value harmony and respect to higher level / senior people more than individual opinions, success and ambitions.

Do you feel differences (personal, cultural, experience) caused by international assignment to Japan (please explain)?

- Often Japanese people stay in the same company for their whole career. For that reason, there are a lot of incredibly experienced employees on various fields here (we are talking about decades...).
- For me as a young engineer, it is a great opportunity to exchange and learn from these highly experienced people, and also transfer knowhow between the companies.
- It is very interesting to experience and practice in a different way of working and collaboration, also to learn about the advantages and disadvantages of my own approach. In any case it widens the horizon and improves understanding for working methods and exchange between people.



## **Attachment 8-Checklist of Activities and Support for the Process of Assignment**

### Documentation Needed:

- Obtain or update passports
- Apply for work and entry permits
- Birth certificate(s)
- Marriage certificate, if applicable
- School reports, if applicable
- Immunization documents, including any medical report, X-rays, details of prescription drugs
- Academic and professional certificates if needed for work permit application
- Blood group identification
- Updated home country drivers' licenses
- Veterinarian's report on dog(s), cat(s), or other pets to be relocated
- Detailed list of household and personal effects being shipped overseas
- Copy of will
- Copy of last year's tax returns
- Obtain family's health records

### Banking and Money:

- Home-country bank account arrangements – retain/close
- Correspondent banking arrangements
- Notify credit companies, publications
- Make sure ATM card is usable in host country or obtain traveler's checks
- Obtain internationally usable credit cards, if necessary
- Cancel in writing any automatic deductions which should not continue
- Arrange continuing payment facilities in the home country as necessary, e.g., children's support, taxes, insurance, charities
- Make arrangements for handling investments in home country
- Decide on arrangements for other savings deposits
- Meet with tax accountant
- Review charitable contributions with tax preparer

### Government, Civic and Religious

- Resign from civic, local school committees, church, local charity boards, etc.
- Consider action to be taken regarding membership in clubs and other organizations
- Notify post office to redirect mail or obtain services of mail forwarding company

### Education

- Obtain record of children's academic progress
- Notify school – talk with teachers
- Apply to host-country school; arrange interview, if required
- Obtain children's health records, if needed for school

### Property

- Cancel lease, if housing is rented
- Owned home disposal – sell or rent? Consider company policy implications
- If owned home is going to be rented out, investigate:
  - Whether to rent out furnished or unfurnished
  - Insurance implications
  - Repair arrangements

- Tax payment arrangements
- Finding tenants
- Utilities
- If owned home is to be retained unoccupied, investigate:
  - Oversight of property while unoccupied
  - Whether to store any furniture and appliances
  - Insurance implications
  - Repair arrangements
  - Tax payment arrangements
  - Utilities (winterization)

### Legal

- Revisions to will
- Consider whether to take or leave other legal documents, stocks, bonds, etc.
- Control of funds for aged relatives or dependent children remaining in home country
- List of relatives to contact in emergency
- List of assets and debts – where located
- Retain copies of all documents taken to host country
- Do not store any documents with household goods storage

### Vehicle

- Arrange to ship or to buy an automobile or automobiles overseas, if needed
- Dispose of vehicle(s) not being shipped
- Obtain host-country driver's license shortly after arrival

### Health and Medical

- Physical checkup, if desired or required
- Consult with personal physician regarding any recommended immunizations for host country or if new position entails significant travel (check online resources within home country re-immunizations as well)
- Get generic names of all drugs prescribed – take a supply, special needs, physical therapy, etc.
- Determine where treatments can continue in host country
- Orthodontist report, teeth molds, etc.
- Get additional pairs of glasses or large supply of contact lenses, plus ophthalmologist's or optician's prescription. The latter may be needed for host-country driver's license.
- Advise eligible dependents remaining in home country of range of health services available under company program, if any, and how to claim reimbursement of hospital, medical and dental expenses. Arrange for efficient claims process – filing and receiving reimbursement for deposit

### Furnishings and Household Contents

- Subdivide household goods into “move,” store,” and “dispose.”
- Storage – list items to be placed in long-term storage in home country
- Obtain estimates of shipping and storage costs from company-identified moving and storage company
- For specialty items to be stored, identify any special instructions, e.g., oiling or other care of antique furniture
- Shipping:
  - Split “move” items into “immediate” or “later” if there is to be both an air and surface shipment

- Have special items like antiques professionally valued for customs and insurance purposes
- Get packing and shipping bids
- Arrange packing date(s)
- List all items to be taken for insurance and customs inspection, including replacement value of those items
- Take list to host-country consular office in home country
- Complete customs declaration form: note any household items to be imported after the main shipment, if applicable
- Disposal:
  - Arrange sale or disposal of items no longer required or covered by company policy, e.g., boats, snowmobiles, trailers, recreational vehicles, etc.
  - Check replacement costs on items which preferably should not be stored or taken (e.g., old furniture) if they will be replaced in host country

#### Language/Intercultural Training:

- If provided for in policy, schedule timing and location of host-country language lessons or intercultural training prior to transfer
- Obtain dual-language dictionary, grammar book and tourist phrase book in host-country language
- Arrange host-country language training after transfer, if covered by policy or if desired

#### Actual Move to Host Country

- Flight bookings should be arranged through company program
- Arrange guaranteed hotel booking in in-transit location, if provided for in policy
- Arrange guaranteed hotel booking in host country
- Rental of automobile in home country after sale of personal automobile(s), if necessary
- Hotel/motel accommodations needed prior to departure
- Arrange for someone to meet family in host country upon arrival, if desired
- Assemble items to take on flight. Anticipate two weeks of living in temporary housing so pack enough clothing and other items, e.g., medicines, contact lenses, etc.

#### Personal and Miscellaneous

- Notify relatives and friends of how you may be contacted on a temporary basis initially and then provide them with permanent housing information
- Cancel subscriptions to periodicals and newspapers
- Cancel department store charge accounts, gasoline credit cards, etc.
- Plan a few days of vacation just before departure
- Put all important, personal documentation in one bag to be carried with you
- Notify post office
- Keep accurate record of expenses and all receipts
- Arrange to transport or give away pets
- Pack valuables to carry with you
- Renew home-country driver's license
- Engage/hire mail forwarding service and determine if company policy reimburses