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### **Why do they come to London? Exploring the Motivations of Expatriates to Work in the British Capital**

#### **Abstract**

The literature has hitherto neglected the influence of specific cities on the decision to work abroad, implicitly treating all locations within countries as similar. Using a boundaryless careers and expatriation perspective, the research investigates a range of specific motives that individuals have when working in London, the British capital. The results of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and a large scale quantitative survey shed light on the relative importance of individual drives, career and development motivations, family and partner factors, organizational context, national and city-specific considerations to come to London. A range of London-specific attributes are identified and their importance assessed. A new framework of individual international mobility drivers is developed. The findings reiterate the importance of individual preparation of international sojourns based on proactive location choice. They also add to academic insights and inform organizational strategies, policies and practices with respect to international mobility.

Keywords: International Mobility, Motivation to Work Abroad, Global Careers,  
City Attractiveness

## **Introduction**

It is presumably no accident that Michael Douglas, playing a rogue trader in the film 'Wall Street', works in New York rather than in Atlanta, New Orleans, Seattle or San Francisco. It is likely that if an overseas fashion designer had a choice she would select working in Milan over Naples; a foreign-born investment banker would choose London over Leicester or a non-European automotive specialist Stuttgart over Kiel. While some specialist activities have 'regions or cities of excellence', many cities are associated with strong images and reputations in the minds of individuals (Global Market Insite, 2006).

Boundaryless careers involve the movement across physical and psychological barriers. Sullivan and Arthur (2006) examine international work and link it to high degrees of both physical and psychological mobility. However, the literature has hitherto neglected the influence of specific cities on the decision to work abroad. This paper attempts to redress this situation. In a first step we will explore the importance of a variety of influence factors that impact on the decision to come to work in the British capital. Second, based on the findings, this paper will draw up a framework of decision categories for working abroad. In so doing, we will contribute to the literature on boundaryless careers.

Globalization has been one of the triggers for the emergence of the boundaryless career (Gunz and Peiperl, 2007). There is some indication that organizations find that demand for competent global managers can be bigger than

the supply (Quelch and Bloom, 1999; GMAC, 2008; Schuler et al, forthcoming). Moreover, many potential expatriates do not seem willing to accept foreign assignments (Harvey, 1996; Ball, 1999; Dickmann et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand the motives of individuals to accept a foreign position. However, the literature is lacking in several respects. First, there is a strong focus on Western expatriates to the detriment of other international assignees (Richardson and Mallon, 2005). Second, most existing research tends to explore the *willingness* to accept a foreign posting rather than the attitudes influencing the *actual* decision process (Brett and Stroh, 1995; Tharenou, 2003). Third, there is a dearth of studies that attempt to capture the relative importance of factors on the decision of individuals. While Stahl, Miller and Tung (2002) go beyond a simple list to provide a ranking, this does not facilitate a nuanced understanding of the importance and differences between the various items. Fourth, the impact of location factors which are more specific than national influences remains relatively neglected in the literature. The research presented in the paper attempts to address these points.

### **Understanding the motives for expatriation**

There are a range of categories that have been identified as driving the decision to expatriate. The existing literature distinguished between career and development considerations, organisational factors, individual interests, experiences and drives, family and partner considerations, including issues such as dual careers or influences of the extended family, as well as national factors (Gregersen,

Morrison and Black 1998; Hammer, Hart and Rogan, 1998; Tung, 1998; Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Mendenhall, 2001; Stahl, Miller and Tung, 2002; Richardson and Mallon, 2005). We will briefly review each of these areas before arguing that a further category, specific location factors which are distinct from national factors, can have a major impact in the decision to work abroad.

### *Career and Development Considerations*

Career advancement has been shown to be a key motivator for managers to accept an international posting (Dickmann et al., 2008). Other authors argue that expatriates appreciate their international experience as an opportunity for personal and professional development and career advancement (Brett and Stroh, 1995; Stahl and Cerdin, 2004). Moreover, internationally mobile employees value the opportunity to learn unusual skills and gather foreign experiences (Tung, 1998).

Considerations by individuals of their future job and the impact of foreign work on their own development and career opportunities are likely to be key considerations for company-sent internationally mobile individuals (Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Yan, Hu and Hall, 2002; Harris and Dickmann, 2005), and self-initiated expatriates (Richardson and Mallon, 2005). The job offered in an international assignment, and, linked, the career opportunities that might arise from the posting have a strong influence on the decision to accept the foreign work (Stahl, Miller and Tung, 2002).

### ***Organisational Factors - The Expatriation Package***

The likely financial impact of accepting an international assignment influences an individual's decision to accept an overseas post (Yurkiewicz and Rosen, 1995). Stahl et al. (2002) argue that the importance of financial packages may vary according to the nationality of individuals, with their sample of German managers appearing to rate financial considerations as less influential compared to findings from American research (Yurkiewicz and Rosen, 1995). Moreover, the 'package' that expatriates may expect also includes non-financial items such as the expected length of stay and the repatriation package (Dickmann et al., 2006). There is increasing evidence that expatriates are relatively discontent with the repatriation policies and practices of their corporations (Sparrow, Brewster and Harris, 2004; Cerdin, 2008). The effects of these issues on the acceptance of foreign work opportunities remain under-explored.

### ***Individual Interests, Experiences and Drives***

Career decisions are substantially influenced by one's own values (Schein, 1978). Much of the vocational literature is devoted to what kind of job is attractive to individual careerists (Savickas, 2007). Less research, however, is devoted to the attractiveness of international work. Tharenou (2003) found that, amongst other factors, if family considerations were of low importance and where the individual had no partner, self-efficacy and personal agency has an effect on the receptivity to working abroad. Vance (2005) describes self-initiated career path strategies and activities for obtaining significant foreign work experience. Before individuals

work abroad much planning and effort has already happened. This allows the speculation that individuals often pursue personal interests by accepting international work, an argument that is supported by other researchers (Inkson, Arthur and Barry, 1997; Tung, 1998). While personal challenge (Stahl et al., 2002) or the desire for adventure, travel and life change can be motives (Richardson and Mallon, 2005; Dickmann et al., 2008), little is known about the factors that attract individuals to work in specific cities.

### ***Family and Partner Considerations***

There is increasing literature that addresses the families of internationally mobile professionals, expatriate couples and dual careers (Brett and Stroh, 1995; Harvey 1995; Linehan and Walsh, 2000). Stahl et al. (2002) argue that family or spouse-related motives are only moderately important in accepting international assignments. Their data illustrates that family influences were in the bottom third of the twelve items which were ranked by German respondents for importance. Other studies which targeted individuals from other nations, however, come to other conclusions. Researchers such as Cerdin (2008) and Sparrow, Brewster and Harris (2004) argue that in planning and selecting for an assignment, the willingness to relocate by both partners should be taken into account. Richardson and Mallon (2005, p. 414) and Richardson (2006) argue that family factors can be an incentive to expatriation. The reasons can often be found in the broad learning experiences and the opportunities for education that the prospective expatriates perceive for their families in the target location prior to working overseas.

Therefore, general educational systems considerations together with city-specific opportunities for schooling or tertiary education might be important for the 'decision to go'.

### ***National Factors***

Much of the research on international moves has focussed on how expatriates adjust emotionally and intellectually to a new national cultural environment (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall, 1992; Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Shaffer and Luk, 2005; Haslberger, 2005). The findings confirm the importance of companies' international mobility policies and practices (such as pre-departure preparation), and the influence of host culture, personal security, intercultural sensitivity and language compatibility. Other studies have concentrated on distinguishing the receptivity to international careers in relation to relocation to developed or developing countries (Tharenou, 2003), looking at national factors such as the political stability of the host country, hostility to nationals from the parent country or general climate (Yurkiewicz and Rosen, 1995).

From a marketing perspective, Lala, Allred and Chakraborty (2009) draw up a country image measure distinguishing economic conditions, the prevalence of conflict, political structure, vocational training, work culture, environment and labour areas. However, the role which cities and their specific context play in the decision to work abroad has been relatively neglected hitherto in the literature.



### *Specific Location Factors*

Given how important the immediate context can be to people this is astonishing. The level of security that individuals might perceive is likely to depend not just on national factors but also on the security situation in their city or town and even in relation to their particular area. Career progress is influenced not just by what people know but also who they know and what influences their knowing why (Inkson and Arthur, 2001; Raider and Burt, 1996). Jokinen, Brewster and Sutari (2008) explore the development of career capital through international work and find that overall knowing why and knowing whom capital is seen to be impacted strongly. Individuals who seek international work in order to build their job capabilities are more likely to go to perceived centres of excellence (Doherty and Dickmann, 2009).

The literature on what influences the decisions of individuals to accept (or seek) a domestic relocation may give us valuable insights into decision factors in international moves. Intra-country moves have many parallels with international work as they also have career implications, affect social networks and can have significant family implications in terms of children's schooling etc (Dickmann and Baruch, 2011). Furthermore, within some countries such as Switzerland, Belgium or Spain regional cultural variations are substantial.

Noe and Barber (1993) looked at intra-country moves. In a US study of 270 employees the authors found that the destination has an impact in that

respondents preferred to move to similar communities (e.g. from city to city or from rural to rural environments). Amongst others, career factors and community attachment influenced the location decision. Noe and Barber concluded that in relocation research “extreme caution should be employed in generalizing across different categories of destinations (p. 170)”. It is therefore surprising that there is a dearth of research on the detailed impact of location factors on the acceptance of international postings.

### **London as a Destination**

About 7.5 million people lived in London in 2005 (ONS, 2007a). Working in London as a foreign-born individual is common as a third of all jobs in London are held by migrants (LSE, 2007). In 2004, approximately 30% of London’s inhabitants came from ethnic minorities and one quarter of London’s population was born overseas (ONS, 2007b). It seems that London is highly ethnically diverse.

A PEST analysis, comprising political, economic, socio-cultural and technological factors, may be used to understand some of the location-specific attributes that influence the decisions of overseas nationals who seek to work in a specific city. In the case of London as with many other European countries and cities, individuals may be attracted by living in a stable, democratic society that has relatively high levels of security and extensive checks on the power of diverse institutions (Hollingsworth and Boyer, 1997; Lane, 1995). Inner London was the

wealthiest region in Europe (Eurostat, 2005) and the gross value added per head was 53% above the UK national average in 2005 (ONS, 2007b). Foreign workers may be attracted by the high salary levels (ONS, 2005), the general standard of living in the city (Eurostat, 2005) and the high skills base (Cushman & Wakefield, 2007). However, environmental concerns (ONS, 2007b) such as the high pollution levels (Cushman & Wakefield, 2007), higher unemployment levels than the average for the UK (ONS, 2007a) and cost of living in the British capital may act as a deterrent. In a recent comparison of cost of living in 50 cities, London was second highest (after Moscow) with 26.3 percent higher living costs than New York (Mercer, 2007).

In terms of socio-cultural factors, individuals considering moving to London may value the opportunities for education (Global Market Insite, 2005). In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, London was home to 42 universities and colleges attracting over 70,000 students from outside the UK (GLA Economics, 2004). However, the crime rate in London was almost 30% higher than the rest of the UK in 2005/6 (ONS, 2007b) and the British capital was ranked in the lower third for quality of living by Mercer (2006). Some organisations in London also claim that much of the arts and culture created in the UK capital is important to foreigners and a source of high reputation for the city (London Tourist Board and Convention Bureau, 1996). Finally, London is highly integrated into the global financial (Global Market Insite, 2005) and transport systems, where it was ranked

both for international and internal transport number one out of 33 European cities (Cushman & Wakefield, 2007).

Overall, it might be that London is seen as an attractive place to live by foreigners. In contrast, the high cost and relatively low quality of living data indicates that there may be substantial barriers for individuals to come to London. More research is needed to investigate what drives the decision processes of individuals who come to work in London and how important these factors are.

To summarise, this article focuses, first, on exploring the influence factors on the decision of foreign professionals to work in the British capital. Because little is known about special attributes of cities and their influences on expatriation decisions, the research concentrates on exploring the nature and importance of location-specific influence factors on the decision to go to a particular city, in this case the British capital. Second, based on the data of this investigation and the insights of the literature it will suggest a framework of expatriation decision factors.

## **Methodology**

### ***Qualitative Study***

We employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative study, carried out between August and October 2005, was based on eleven in-

depth interviews with five Americans, four Asians and two non-English Europeans who were either working or had worked in London. A government sponsored agency had provided us with seven of the contacts, a further four individuals agreed to be interviewed through a process of snowball sampling (Myers and Pringle, 2005).

The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Table 1 gives an overview of the interviewees while Appendix 1 details the semi-structured interview questions.

All interviews were taped and transcribed. A manual template analysis (King, 1998) was carried out due to the small number of interviews. Two researchers read the transcripts, structured the data into patterns and analytical themes that recurred and reviewed the data iteratively. In an independent step a further researcher reviewed their work in order to increase reliability. We used hierarchical coding with codes such as family and partner, individual or career and development considerations defined a priori based on the available literature and our interview questionnaire. This is seen as one of the best ways for constructing an initial template (King, 1998, p. 122). The interviews allowed to explore the individuals' work and career contexts (Yin, 2003) and other codes - such as history, time-zone or cross-cultural tolerance and understanding - emerged in the analysis and were inserted (King, 1998, p. 125). To gain further

insights about how extensive certain drivers were amongst our interview sample, we quantified each theme how often it was mentioned.

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**take in Table 1**  
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### *Quantitative Survey*

A web-based quantitative survey to investigate the motivations of respondents to work in London was designed. Based on academic literature, findings of the qualitative study and discussions with expatriation experts 25 items to the key questions that is analysed in this paper (see Table 2) were included. The question was “How much influence did the following factors have on your decision to work in London?”. It used a seven point Likert scale ranging from no influence to very great influence, the scale anchors were generated with reference to tested scale formats (British Telecom, 1981). We piloted the questionnaire with 45 foreign-born MBA students, their responses were analysed and feedback through follow-up interviews and emails was gathered. After small amendments the questionnaire was posted on the SurveyMonkey website with access available through invitations.

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Through a government-sponsored agency that works with foreign companies located in London HR heads were contacted and the purpose of the study was described to them. They were asked to contact expatriates working in their entity in London; volunteer participants could take up the survey invitations. We also send emails to remind potential participants. Through this method we obtained 348 responses, 34 percent from Europe, eighteen percent from the USA and Canada, seventeen percent from China and India and thirteen percent from Australia and New Zealand. In total, people from 45 countries participated out of whom 63.7 percent were male. A higher percentage of male expatriates are common in international mobility (GMAC, 2008). Nearly two thirds of the sample were married or living with a partner. Slightly more than half (53.1%) were accompanied by at least one child. Approximately sixty percent classified themselves as managers with 11 percent describing themselves as technical specialists. Almost two thirds of respondents worked for organisations with more than 1,000 employees. While the precise mix of the expatriate population in London is not clear, the resulting sample might not be very different from the diverse mix of professional foreigners working in London (Think London, 2003; LSE, 2007).

The survey was open between November and December 2005. The response database was then entered into an SPSS file for analysis. Below we present the data from the qualitative and quantitative studies.

## **Reasons to Go to London**

The findings section is first exploring the reasons individuals have to go to London. The literature review outlined that key categories of motivation to work abroad include career and professional development, organisational factors, personal interests, family and partner considerations, national as well as city location influences.

### ***Career and Professional Development Considerations***

From the interviews it emerged that career and professional development considerations were key factors in the decision to come to London. One key influence, quoted by nine interviewees, was their own career progression.

*Being posted to London feels like a career achievement in itself. (Cheng)*

*I think for my career it's probably one of the best places to be. (Alison)*

Eight of the eleven interviewees were posted to London and one of the key considerations for these was the job on offer.

*I think for some reason everybody knows that London is such a huge business centre that I think they respect me in business more, knowing that I have made it here to London and taking the position that I have. (Jim)*

The findings from the interviews are supported by the survey data. Table 3 below shows the results of a descriptive analysis of the twenty-five factors in the decision to work abroad. Results are presented in order of rated influence, from most influential to least.

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**take in Table 3**

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It is worth noting the objective level at which these items are assessed as influential. The seven-point scale ran between no influence and very great influence. The three most influential items have an average response of above five indicating a response between considerable and great influence. A mean response at this level suggests these items are very important in the decision of people who opted to come to London.

Key influences in the decision to come to London are career and professional development considerations with work/non-work balance considerations having a moderate influence. This extends the findings from other research (Yurkiewicz and Rosen, 1995) to a broader set of nationalities. Moreover, in contrast to other studies that have employed rankings (e.g. Stahl et al., 2002) this research gives an indication of how important the various factors are in the decision to go to London and allows a more nuanced view. Another advantage of this survey was that respondents were asked whether certain factors encouraged or discouraged them when choosing to come to London. 89.5% suggested they were either encouraged or strongly encouraged by the perceived impact on career. While some authors have begun to challenge the view that international moves are necessarily good for individual's careers (Dickmann and Harris, 2005) these findings indicate that individuals coming to London are still overwhelmingly persuaded that it will benefit them.

### ***Organisational Factors - Expatriate Package***

Eight interviewees were company-sent expatriates while one set up his own business (Dieter) and a further two were self-initiated individuals who only found work after they had arrived in London. All company-sent individuals were on a 'cost of living allowance' (COLA) financial contract (for an exploration of the COLA mechanism see Perkins and Festing, 2008) which would have also been applied in other locations such as Paris or Vienna. Therefore, the monetary incentives appeared to be general rather than location-specific. The package the companies offered to the eight company-sent employees was one important, but generally not the most important, consideration to go and work in the British capital. Seven of these were content with the practical arrangements such as accommodation or general relocation support they had received from their employers. Only one interviewee put a key emphasis on the personal financial impact.

*Life here is really much more expensive... but I was aware of that and, in a sense, my expectations became true. That's why I insisted on a good salary.... Without it, I would not have come. (Daniele)*

Three interviewees mentioned that the length of stay in London had an impact on their decision. They generally preferred a traditional, long-term assignment of a minimum of two years to a shorter time in the UK capital and, therefore, thought that their expatriation packages which included assignments

that were all scheduled to last more than two years contributed to their decision to go to London.

The quantitative survey indicated that all organisational factors pertaining to the expatriation package were in the bottom half of importance. Pre-departure preparation was the least important decision factor and expected length of stay as well as personal financial impact had a moderate importance. Our data indicated that in a city that is seen as amongst the world's most expensive (Global Market Insite, 2005:5) financial considerations are of moderate importance for middle and high ranking professionals. The more important motivators may lie in other areas.

### ***Individual Factors***

Overall, only a few interviewees pointed at individual factors having an influence on their decision to work abroad. Four interviewees had a desire for adventure, travel and challenge (cf. Inkson and Myers, 2003; Richardson and Mallon, 2005) which had also some influence on the decision to go to London. In addition to these, there were three interviewees outlining that they were attracted by the 'energy' of London:

*I think underneath it is much more diversified, much more international and much more energetic. I can say that there are no cities comparable with London, maybe in the US it is New York but I would say London is outstanding – it is full of energy and that was a real pull factor for me.*  
(Cheng)

The survey also showed no strong impact of individual factors on the decision to expatriate with the most important one – your adaptability to UK culture – exerting a moderate influence (see Table 3). Interestingly, the interviewees often linked ‘energy’ to the diversity of a city and its multiculturalism (covered below). It seems that issues such as energy, diversity and multiculturalism are often seen in special reference to a location rather than a country. They are under-explored in the current international mobility literature.

### ***Family and Partner Considerations***

Ten of the eleven interviewees had partners when they took the decision to go to London. The data from five interviews showed that family issues influenced the decision whether and where to work internationally.

*From a social perspective I would say that it will be a great experience for us in terms of my family and personally. (John)*

Those five interviews revealed that educational issues were generally seen as incentives to come to London (cf. Global Market Insite, 2005). The remaining five interviewees – four of these without children at the time of the move (Sunil had a daughter born in London) and one with a child – did not mention family issues. Overall, this supported Richardson and Mallon’s (2005) argument against the prevailing view that the educational context of the host country is primarily seen as a deterrent to family moves.

The survey indicates that the most important family item – willingness of the partner/family to move – exerts between moderate and considerable influence on the expatriation decision. Overall, both interviews and survey indicated that family considerations in the decision to go to London normally have some but not the most decisive influence. In addition, the interview data show that many interviewees saw the move as beneficial for their families (cf. Richardson, 2006).

### ***UK Factors***

Factors such as national culture, language and history were treated as country factors. Three interviewees noted that improving their English (and that of their families) was an incentive to work in London:

*...so by moving to London and giving my child the opportunity to become bilingual. (Daniele)*

The survey showed that both the opportunity to improve one's English and UK culture had only a moderate influence on the decision to work in London (Table 3). However, in the interviews certain common features and historical links made the move easier and created an emotional affiliation for some (Sunil, Ali, Dieter, Alison and Jim):

*There is so much in common with UK and India in terms of language, the laws, regulations, the culture to an extent, the educational system it makes life emotionally easy and on top of that we have a long shared history... that arguably the pull is much stronger to be in London than it would ever be to*

*be in Zurich or New York where there is absolutely no emotional linkage.*

*(Ali).*

The historical links to former colonies and other states which may have led to parallel developments in areas such as schooling, laws, regulations, availability of ethnic food or even on which side cars drive can be moderately powerful motives for some individuals to go abroad and work in a host country. These factors have been neglected in the literature – a more in-depth exploration may be valuable. The interviewees were encouraged to distinguish wider UK factors from London-specific influences. The results are outlined below.

### ***London Factors***

Eight interviewees stressed job related reasons to come to London. Eight interviewees referred to London as being the global or European *centre* in their area of work:

*I have a strong preference to be here in London as opposed to say being in Paris or being in Berlin... even if I had a European or worldwide responsibility I would want to be based here in London because I think this is the centre of things here. (Bruce)*

The survey supported this in that the most important location factor was “Reputation for London as a global centre for business” (see Table 3) having an (almost) considerable influence in the decision to go to London. This

reputational factor was followed by the “Desire to live in London” in terms of importance for the decision to work in London.

*Multi-cultural* was a descriptor that was used by all interviewees in a positive way. London was seen by every interviewee as multi-cultural. One outlined:

*Multi-culturalism and the integration of so many different communities. New York is probably the only other city in the world that comes close to London. (John)*

Many overseas-born individuals regarded it as important that London had a reputation to be a multi-cultural city. In the survey respondents indicated a moderate to considerable influence on their decision to seek or accept expatriation (see Table 3). For some interviewees, the embracing of different cultures, especially cross-cultural tolerance and understanding, could act as a strong motivator to come to London.

While all interviewees outlined what they gained from living in London in terms of *learning* (see below), five pointed out that these were driving factors in deciding to work in London:

*Every day I'm here you learn something different through interacting with different people than I was used to. (John)*

Other London-specific influences include the *fame and reputation* that the UK capital enjoyed (Global Market Insite, 2005). The survey also showed a moderate influence of the prestige of working in London on the decision to come to London (see Table 3). Moreover, four interviewees commented on the politeness of *interpersonal interactions*, the tolerance they had encountered and perceived helpfulness:

*And most of the people I knew or came to know were very polite and very considerate and they understood that there were difficulties for me and helped me. (Kenichi)*

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative data support the notion that individuals conduct complex assessments before deciding to go abroad. Importantly, the findings make it clear that London-specific influence factors were important decision variables for individuals.

Cities had specific attributes in the minds of the interviewees. Many of the statements of the interviewees showed that they implicitly compare cities when making their expatriation decision. A multitude of comparison criteria – varying, amongst other dimensions, with individuals, their perceptions and experiences of living in other cities – emerged. These criteria were broad and included monetary, emotional, professional, cultural, travel, networking, and work/non-work balance considerations. Some interviewees also linked elements of history, education and time-zone to their choice of foreign destination which we treated as national



rather than city location factors. The particular historical links of London and the UK to Asian countries was attractive to the Chinese and Indian interviewees.

In summary, it emerged that for the interviewees the specific city rather than only the country of assignment seemed to be important for their decision to go to London. The city was not the only decision factor due to complex linkages to the expected job, development and career opportunities, family issues, personal interest, considerations regarding the costs of living in London with respect to the expatriation ‘package’ and wider cultural issues. The survey underlined that core London-specific motivators included that the UK capital was seen as a global centre for the interviewees’ work, its multi-culturalism, the ability to network and tap ideas and the prestige to work in London.

### **The nature of influence factors on the decision to go abroad**

In this part we discuss the two research themes posed at the end of the literature review. The first one addressed the nature of the influence of the specific location on the motivation of expatriates to go. The qualitative and quantitative findings suggest that a framework of influence factors on international mobility should include location factors that are more specific than the national state, national culture, climate or political stability as hitherto customary in the literature (cf. Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall, 1992; Yurkiewicz and Rosen, 1995; Haslberger, 2005).

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**Take in Figure 1 here**

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Figure 1 depicts key categories of influences on the decision to go abroad. It outlines six categories and, within these, a wide range of key factors that can influence an individual's decision to go abroad. In so doing, it adds detail to the current literature that identifies career, job, development, expatriate package, individual factors, family and partner considerations and national issues as key variables in the international mobility decision.

As a distinct contribution and based on the analysis of key influence factors a sixth dimension was identified: location. From our research a range of city-specific influence factors have emerged, namely the central role of London for many industries, its multi-culturalism with its links to cross-cultural tolerance and understanding, the learning opportunities, transport links, a general desire to live in London and the UK capital's reputation and fame. We summarised these under the sub-category headings behaviour and attitudes of citizens, centrality and reputation for business and other factors such as transport and multi-culturalism.

If location is a substantial decision parameter for individuals it indicates that international mobility policies of companies should not only factor in cost of living differentials but could usefully explore the range of factors that may make particular locations interesting for individuals. While HR professionals and other superiors may use certain attributes to 'sell' a move to a specific location to

potential expatriates, companies' mobility policies seem to concentrate on uniform expatriation principles and reward-driven deals (Dickmann et al., 2008). In turn, Vance (2005) argues that individuals prepare for their international sojourns. If they identify locations that are especially interesting to them they may use a consciously tailored preparation approach, including acquiring the necessary language skills, local networks and other location-specific insights and experiences.

The inter-relationship of the factors in Figure 1 can be substantial. This is the reason that the figure uses non-continuous lines as demarcations between categories. For instance, security can be both seen as a national or specific location factor by individuals. Other factors that can be seen from different angles include many aspects of the career and development category. For instance, professional development and the acquisition of social capital is impacted by both the organisation and individual (cf. Dickmann et al., 2008).

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In the context of boundaryless careers, this paper explored the key factors that determined the decisions of foreign-born professionals to work in London. Eleven in-depth interviews generated insights that allowed a first understanding of the general and London-specific motives. Based on the literature review and the qualitative research a survey was developed that assessed the importance of 25

items for an individual's decision to work in the British capital. The data from the 348 survey responses and the qualitative research confirmed that the decision to work abroad is determined by many influence factors. One contribution of the present study is to present a picture of the influence factors that is more in-depth. It goes beyond the hitherto predominantly used rankings (e.g. Stahl et al., 2002) to outline numerical values, thereby enabling a better understanding of the actual strengths of these factors. Moreover, it identifies some relatively neglected factors such as time-zones, colonial history or networking patterns that can act as powerful incentives to work in London.

Existing studies into the motives of expatriates to accept foreign work neglect factors that are linked to specific cities rather than broader country influences. A second contribution of this research is the explication of location-specific decision factors, the assessment of their importance and the construction of a new framework (Figure 1) that delineates key categories of influences on the international mobility decision.

There are some well-known drawbacks to the qualitative and quantitative parts of the study. These include the limited generalisability of findings of interview studies, especially as we interviewed 'white collar' workers and managers. However, the interviews aimed to generate first insights into the rich context, the 'what' and 'how' of specific location decisions and the exploration of interrelationships (Yin, 2003). With respect to the survey, one limitation is that

we had to balance the advantages of a large list of items (more than sixty) with the parsimony needed. Obviously, survey respondents needed access to the internet. Moreover, respondents in both the qualitative and quantitative parts were volunteers making it very difficult to control the final geographical constitution and incorporating a degree of self-selection which restricts the generalisability of findings further. Thus, the reader is urged to interpret findings cautiously.

Overall, the findings suggest that individuals make complex assessments guided by intrinsic career and development considerations, a sophisticated evaluation of location attributes and a consideration of the other factors outlined in Figure 1 before they accept overseas work. However, individuals can be more proactive than outlined in the sentence above. In a world where career boundaries seem to diminish, individuals are the owners of their careers. Individuals need to go beyond the image of a city to gather relevant information in order to make more informed choices and to develop and implement personal strategies to go to their preferred locations (Vance, 2005). Managers, in turn, would benefit from understanding the interplay of individual motivations and location context. Developing adequate organisational incentives might become an important tool to manage (potential) expatriates before, during and after their time abroad. In order to improve our understanding of global career strategies and behaviours a more in-depth exploration of the relative attractiveness of diverse cities and rural locations is needed.

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**Appendix 1:****Key questions in the semi-structured interview schedule**

1. Why did you take up the work in London? What role did London play in the decision process?
2. What key expectations did you have prior to coming to London?
3. What skills, knowledge and abilities did you want to acquire in London? How important was this for you in your decision to come to London?
4. What impact did you think a move to London would have on your social networks? How important was this for you in your decision to come to London?
5. What effect did you think London would have on your work/life balance? How important was this for you in your decision to come to London?
6. How important was the 'deal' for you in coming to London? Please comment on financial arrangements, length of stay, repatriation promises (if relevant) and other for you important factors.
7. What influence did family and partner considerations have in deciding to work in London? Please explain?
8. Were there personal motives for you to work in London? What were these and how important were they?
9. What other considerations had an impact on your decision to come to London?
10. Did your organization ask you to move and work in London? If yes, what do you think were the reasons your organization had?

**Table 1.** Overview of Interviewees

<b>Inter- viewee</b>	<b>Age in Years</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Vocation / Job</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Expatriate Experience Elsewhere</b>	<b>Expatriation Initiation</b>
Bruce	30	Married, no children	UK Company Director	US American	None	company-sent
Sunil	31	Married, one child	Director	Indian	Dubai, Dallas, New York	company-sent
Cheng	34	Married, no children	Executive Vice- President	Chinese	New York	company-sent
Sue	34	Married, no children	Designer (Manager Level)	US American	None	self-initiated
Daniele	35	Married, one child	UK Manager	Italian	10 Locations	company-sent
Ali	36	Married, one child	Global Executive Director	Indian	New York, Zurich, Sydney	company-sent
Dieter	36	Married, three children	Managing Director	German	Lyon	self-initiated
Jim	42	Married, two children	Director	US American	None	company-sent
Alison	49	Married, no children	Interaction Designer, self-employed	US American	Barcelona	self-initiated
John	50	Married, two adult children	MD and Vice- President	US American	None	company-sent
Kenichi	67	Married, two children	Board member	Japanese	New York	company-sent

**Table 2.** Twenty-five decision influences

<b>No.</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Key Link to Category</b>
1	Impact on career	Career & Development
2	The job you were offered	Career & Development
3	Having relevant job related skills	Career & Development
4	Potential for skills development	Career & Development
5	Balance between work and social life	Career & Development
6	Professional challenge of working abroad	Career & Development
7	Opportunities to network in London	Career & Development
8	Maintaining work networks with the home country	Career & Development
9	Maintaining personal networks	Career & Development
10	Potential role(s) available after your work in London	Career & Development
11	Personal financial impact	Organisation
12	Pre-Departure Preparation	Organisation
13	Expected length of stay	Organisation
14	Standard of living in London	Location
15	Reputation of London as a global centre for business	Location
16	London's reputation as a multi-cultural city	Location
17	The Prestige of Working in London	Location
18	Personal safety	Location
23	Desire to live in London	Location
19	The opportunity to improve your English	National / Regional
20	UK culture	National / Regional
21	Willingness of family/partner to move	Family
22	Opportunities for education in London	Family
24	Successful previous assignments	Individual
25	Your adaptability to UK culture	Individual



**Table 3.** The Importance of items on the decision to work in London

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Link Category</b>
Impact on career	1	347	5.53	1.38	C&D
Potential for skills development	2	347	5.31	1.44	C&D
Professional challenge of working abroad	3	347	5.17	1.65	C&D
The job you were offered	4	331	4.93	1.71	C&D
Reputation for London as a global centre for business	5	328	4.84	1.65	Loc.
Having relevant job skills	6	347	4.83	1.62	C&D
Desire to live in London	7	345	4.63	1.82	Loc.
Potential role(s) available after your work in London	8	329	4.56	1.76	C&D
Willingness of partner/family to move *	9	209	4.47	2.07	Fam.
London's reputation as a multi-cultural city	10	327	4.34	1.82	Loc.
Your adaptability to UK culture	11	347	4.27	1.74	Ind.
Opportunities to network in London	12	328	4.13	1.63	C&D
Personal financial impact	13	347	4.12	1.93	Org.
Balance between work and social life	14	344	4.10	1.73	C&D
The prestige of working in London	15	327	4.04	1.80	Loc.
Expected length of stay	16	329	4.02	1.71	Org.
Maintaining personal networks	17	347	3.87	1.68	C&D
Maintaining work networks with the home country	18	345	3.86	1.77	C&D
The opportunity to improve your English *	19	192	3.82	2.10	N / R
UK culture	20	330	3.49	1.80	N / R
Standard of living in London	21	326	3.45	1.64	Loc.
Successful previous assignments *	22	119	3.35	2.17	Ind.
Opportunities for education in London	23	329	2.81	1.92	Fam.
Personal safety	24	329	2.41	1.64	Loc.
Pre-departure preparation	25	325	2.22	1.44	Org.

NB: The analyses of items marked with an asterix (\*) – partner/family's willingness to move, successful previous assignments and chance to improve English language skills – have only included relevant respondents. This accounts for the drop in numbers.

Categories: C&D = Career and Development; Loc. = Location; Fam. = Family; Ind. = Individual; Org. = Organisation; N / R = National / Regional. Values are: 1 = no influence, 2 = little influence, 3 = mild influence, 4 = moderate influence, 5 = considerable influence, 6 = great influence, 7 = very great influence.

**Figure 1.** Key Categories of Influences on the International Mobility Decision

