

**Travelling Without an Anchor:
Risks in Self-Initiated Expatriation**

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Tracey Walmsley, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Business at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Presentations Relating to the Thesis

There are various activities that help to establish credibility in qualitative research, which includes the use of peer reviews (Creswell & Miller, 2000); therefore, attention was given to presenting at academic forums of esteemed institutions to obtain feedback and use the opportunity as a sounding board to develop the research.

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Abstract

Living and working overseas as an expatriate can present a number of risks. Typically, these risks have been explored in the literature as 'physical' risks, such as social unrest, criminality, or natural disasters. However, this approach does not reflect the full extent of personal, social, and relational risks considered in individual expatriation decisions. The dynamic and fluid nature of risks in expatriation is also an underexplored area, with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic bringing this to the fore, supporting the argument that 'mobility is risky'. This notion has implications for the globally mobile workforce, such as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), and is worthy of investigation.

The aim of my study is to explore risks and how they are considered by SIEs. A qualitative approach involving 30 SIEs from Australia is adopted and through a critical realist ontology, I assume that risks are real to them because they are considered through their past and present experiences, anticipation of their future expatriate lives, and through their social interactions with their social networks.

The findings highlight that SIEs demonstrate personal agency and autonomy when considering a range of risks both prior to expatriation and in the host country. The metaphor "*travelling without an anchor*" aptly describes the independent SIEs who are exposed to multiple uncertainties (unknown risks). The study also revealed the important role of emotional, social and relational influences in the assessment of risks. Three risk approaches emerged: '*let's just do it*', '*where's my safety net*' and '*let's take a calculated risk*', reflecting the interplay between cognitive, affective and relational factors that influence one's appetite for risk. Importantly it was found that the consideration of risks is dynamic and non-linear, where a significant event can make additional risks salient or contribute to a shower of risks (coined as '*mercuriality of risk*') for the SIE. These can lead SIEs to re-assess their risks.

The study theoretically contributes to understanding how SIEs consider risks in expatriation. The results provide expatriates, employers, and recruiters with resources to identify risks and understand the approach to risk. Finally, I encourage SIEs not to avoid risks, but to enhance their expatriation experience through the consideration of risks.

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