

Cultural Adaptability of Students at the Faculty of International Relations of the Prague University of Economics and Business

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Abstract: One of the goals of preparing university students at the Faculty of International Relations of the Prague University of Economics is to develop intercultural communication competencies and the ability to adapt to dynamically changing economic and political environments, with a special focus on cultural adaptation. To achieve these goals, elements of intercultural training are incorporated into the compulsory and elective courses, and students also have the opportunity to develop these competencies during their foreign mobilities, international internships, or field internships. This paper discusses the factors of cultural adaptability and their relationship to satisfaction with the stay abroad and the length of this stay. The related phenomena addressed in this paper include the acculturation curve, the role of autonomy, and individualism in young adulthood. The text includes preliminary research on the cultural adaptability test presented in the literature and discusses its possible use as a training tool during lectures or internship supervision.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptability, Young Adulthood, Expatriates

JEL Classification codes: F22, M12, M53

INTRODUCTION

The turbulent changes in the international system currently condition international human resource management. On the one hand, transnational corporations (TNCs) gain a competitive advantage from the effective allocation of resources in a globalized world, utilizing a diverse workforce and having the potential to create their own organizational culture characterized by culturally diverse values, which may differ from the values of the national states in which these TNCs are economically active. On the other hand, international business is influenced by the fourth industrial revolution, with managerial processes increasingly transformed by digitization, artificial intelligence, and virtual and augmented reality. Long-term physical relocations between countries no longer condition entry into foreign cultural environments. It is enough to pass through the reception of an international corporation or join a virtual project team with one click, and a person crosses cultural boundaries without necessarily realizing it.

Society is also changing; considering the generation of young adults, these changes are evident in emphasizing well-being, work-life balance, and the importance of existential topics such as meaningful life. The characteristics of Generation Z intersect with the developmental characteristics of the ontological phase of young adulthood, often resulting in paradoxes such as conspicuous sustainability or succumbing to deceptive tactics of brand-washing, which can be seen in both consumer and organizational behavior.

At the Faculty of International Relations at the Prague University of Economics and Business (FIR VŠE), a wide range of managerial courses, both mandatory and elective, are taught. They aim to prepare students for international human resource management, which includes managing foreign careers, developing intercultural competence, and selecting and managing expatriation. The subject of this article is the factors of successful acculturation, which refers to the process of adapting to a foreign cultural environment. We will focus on both innate personality traits such as temperament and personality characteristics and competencies that can be developed and cultivated through study and training.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of the literature review is to map the issues of cultural adaptability and the factors of successful expatriation in textbooks and classical theories of international human resource management. Perlmutter (1969) laid the basis of the theory of international human resource management in his article "Torturous Evolution of the Multinational Corporation," in which he defined the EPG model – namely, ethnocentric, polycentric, and geocentric strategies. The ethnocentric approach in HR management is characterized by the following statement: "the men of home nationality are recruited and trained for key positions everywhere in the world. (Perlmutter, 1969, p. 12)" According to Štrach (2009), such companies are characterized by a high number of expatriates. According to Zadražilová (2017), companies with a polycentric strategy adapt to local conditions, giving the impression of a local company. This complies with Perlmutter's text: "Local people know what is best for them, and the part of the firm which is located in the host country should be as local in identity as possible" (Perlmutter, 1969, p. 12). From an HR perspective, there is an absence of non-nationals in subsidiaries and, conversely, no local managers in senior positions at headquarters (Perlmutter, 1969). According to Štrach (2009), these companies exhibit a lower number of expatriates than ethnocentric firms. In geocentric companies, global solutions to local problems are sought - serving and saturating local consumers and finding markets for local products (Perlmutter, 1969). Managers are encouraged to build a worldwide career (Zadražilová, 2017). Expatriation is characterized by a high number of home and third-country expatriates (Štrach, 2009).

Perlmutter's article concludes with pragmatic implications of the geocentric ideal: "The geocentric enterprise offers an institutional and supranational framework which could conceivably make war less likely, on the assumption that bombing customers, suppliers and employees is in nobody's interest. (Perlmutter, 1969, p. 18)" This pacifist reflection seems very appealing in the context of contemporary war conflicts (in Ukraine and the Middle East). Visionarily, the author also anticipates that tokenism and window dressing are not phenomena of geocentrism but rather a facade for an ethnocentric approach. To achieve the geocentric ideal, it is essential to develop geocentrically oriented managers. Perlmutter (1969) explicitly mentions the need to address the stress that expatriation brings, care for the adaptation of family members, development of language competencies, and overcoming the complex of cultural superiority and discomfort in relation to foreigners.

Perlmutter implies in his text that there are three categories of traits and competencies: stress and change management of expatriate and family members, language skills, and attitudes and prejudices toward foreign cultures. The question remains how professional managerial literature views these assumptions, which of them are considered innate personality traits, practically unaffected by intercultural training, and which personality traits and competencies can be developed within the framework of intercultural preparation. Zadražilová (2017) distinguishes between specific and general criteria for selecting expatriates, with general criteria primarily including skills (such as communication skills, teamwork and self-development skills, and education) and relational-attitudinal personality traits related to moral development and motivation. Among the specific criteria, the author mentions cultural empathy,

independence, language competence, adaptability of family members, the predominance of personal motivation over financial incentives, and career growth. In contrast, Štrach (2009, p. 89) states that 25% of expatriates leave the company after repatriation. The author explains that such workers might be perceived as having returned from a relaxing vacation from which they financially profited, and repatriates may then be frustrated by the stagnation of their career development compared to colleagues who had been promoted.

Štrach (2009, p. 86) states that an expatriate should be an extrovert, a person open to new experiences and adventures. Nguyen et al. (2010) conducted a validation study of the CCAI (Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory) questionnaire and, to verify construct validity, compared the measurements with the latent variables of the Big Five personality traits. (Big Five traits include extraversion, neuroticism / emotional stability, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness.) They failed to confirm the hypothesis that the latent construct Perceptual Acuity was significantly related to extraversion (Nguyen et al., 2010, p. 122). Additionally, they found: "... none of the Big Five personality dimensions were significantly related to the number of international job assignments ...," (Nguyen et al., 2010, p. 126), which they consider as evidence of the discriminant validity of the CCAI questionnaire (Nguyen et al., 2010). The study indicates "that the two CCAI factors of Emotional Resilience and Personal Autonomy became significant correlates with the self-reported number of international job assignments ..." (Nguyen et al., 2010, p. 112). In this section, we can say that the factors mentioned in Czech literature on international management (Štrach, 2009; Zadražilová, 2017) are defined relatively generally and can be misleading (e.g., extraversion as a predictor of successful expatriation). Additionally, as Nguyen et al. (2010) state, few studies thoroughly examine the validity and reliability of the instruments used in intercultural training.

In this section, we can say that the factors mentioned in Czech literature on international management (Štrach, 2009; Zadražilová, 2017) are defined relatively generally and can be misleading (e.g., extraversion as a predictor of successful expatriation). Additionally, as Nguyen et al. state, few studies thoroughly examine the validity and reliability of the instruments used in intercultural training. In the case that extraversion is a predictor of successful expatriation, this claim needs to be supported by research evidence. Since extraversion is an innate temperamental trait, the assertion that an expatriate should be an extrovert (Štrach, 2009) can be demotivating for introverts. First, we need to determine how extraversion (if at all) contributes to successful expatriation and then address potential compensation. We should also keep in mind that extroverted behavior is related to the ontological phase and defense mechanisms. Moreover, not every culture values extraversion.

Additionally, it is important to define what we mean by successful expatriation and how to measure it. Nguyen et al. (2010) tested the correlation between the Big Five factors and the self-reported number of international job assignments. They concluded that this variable may not be a perfect outcome in global assignment training. In the conclusion of this article, the authors proposed that further research should examine other outcomes, such as expatriate performance or adjustment (Nguyen et al., 2010). In the research section of this paper, we examine the relationship between explicit items of the selected Cultural Adaptability Test and satisfaction with the foreign assignment and the length of stay abroad.

In their research, Nguyen et al. (2010) found that Personal Autonomy (CCAI factor) significantly correlates with self-reported numbers on international job assignments. Lester and Dench (2011) demonstrated a positive correlation between autonomy and homonomy ($r=0.51$, $p<0.001$), and thus they confirmed Angyal's holistic concept of these personality traits (1941). Autonomy and interdependence (homonomy) are positively related to coping with stressful situations; Volfová et al. (2023, p. 13) demonstrated that both autonomy and homonomy are positively related to work-life balance. Matysová (2024) points out in her

research that students in leadership positions within project teams exhibit greater autonomy. The phenomena of autonomy and interdependence are related in young adulthood to the ontological developmental crisis of intimacy versus isolation and in middle adulthood to the crisis of generativity versus stagnation, which involves the issues of forming relationships and being beneficial to one's offspring or society as a whole (Erikson, 1999; Matysová, 2024).

Štrach (2009) designates early return and unsuccessful repatriation as manifestations of unsuccessful expatriation. Failed repatriation may be related to the underappreciation and underutilization of repatriates' potential. Current research points to another unexploited potential, which is self-initiated expatriation (SIE). Andersen et al. (2019) pointed out that initiative depends on the contexts of expatriation, and these contexts are not reflected in contemporary research, while personal initiative has different effects on working styles. The authors recommend measuring personal initiative in three dimensions: self-starting, proactivity, and persistence. Persistence refers to the ability to overcome obstacles, manage setbacks and failure, and endure in expatriation, even when it is not immediately successful (Andersen et al., 2019). By definition, we can relate this dimension of personal initiative to emotional resilience. Nguyen et al. (2010, p.122) confirmed a positive correlation between the Big Five personality trait of emotional stability and the CCAI latent construct of Emotional Resilience ($r=0.35$, $p < 0.05$). It can, therefore, be assumed that part of emotional resilience is related to innate temperament traits. Managerial literature is again generalizing in this context; for example, Luthans and Doh (2012, p. 505) generalize emotional resilience as physical and emotional health.

Considering three components of personal initiative (Andersen et al., 2019), proactivity means anticipating future problems and hurdles, creating action plans, actively seeking opportunities and information, and eliciting feedback. In a managerial view, these are managerial functions of strategic planning and control. As such, they are a subject of managerial education and development. These assumptions comply with international management textbooks. Luthans and Doh elaborate on the motivational prerequisites for expatriation as follows: "International management experts contend that the candidate also must believe in the importance of the job and even have something of an element of idealism or a sense of mission. (Luthans & Doh, 2012, p. 506)" Štrach (2009) mentions work with feedback – eliciting feedback and its usage.

Managerial literature claims that expatriates who are unhappy at home and who take their expatriation as a strategy of escape are not successful (Luthans & Doh, 2012). Przytula and Strzelec (2017) list diverse motives for expatriation such as enjoying an adventure, excitement, developing an international career, escaping from the current lifestyle, financial motivation, and economic factors. The question is to what extent motives for expatriation can be equated with coping mechanisms, which are part of resilience. An expatriate may want to leave a country where they are unhappy, which does not necessarily mean an inability to adapt. Nevertheless, Selmer and Luring examined the typological model of self-initiated expatriates, including mercenary, explorer, architect, and refugee reasons types among expatriate academics, in relation to work performance, work effectiveness, and job satisfaction with the following findings: "There were negative associations between Refugee reasons and work performance ..., work effectiveness ... and job satisfaction... Explorer reasons had a significant positive association with job satisfaction ... Architect reasons had significant positive relationships with work performance ... and work effectiveness ... Mercenary reasons did not have a significant association with any of the criterion variables (Selmer & Luring, 2012, p. 676)" Refugee reasons include unemployment, personal difficulties, escape from a situation, relationships, or experiences in the previous life, discriminatory managerial practices, etc. These findings support statements in managerial literature (Luthans & Doh, 2012; Zdražilová, 2017).

The motivation of refugees and explorers is affective and emotional. Whereas explorers seek excitement and new experiences and want to explore the world, refugees want to escape from the current situation, want something new and are bored with their home country (Selmer & Laurant, 2012). Enthusiasm and excitement are related to the first stage of the acculturation curve, followed by cultural shock. Hofstede et al. (2010) designates the euphoria stage as a honeymoon, the excitement of traveling and seeing new land; it is usually short. Zdražilová (2017) claims cultural shock comes after four months abroad. Przytula and Strzelec (2017) state that SIEs cost the organization less than traditional expatriates. However, they also highlight that SIEs remain an under-researched area in international human resource management.

2 METHODOLOGY

The data were gathered during the summer semester of the 2024/2025 academic year in a compulsory course that includes a topic on international human resource management. The specific timespan of data collection was from the 27th of November to the 28th of November 2024. Students were asked to complete questionnaires, including the Cultural Adaptability Test (Morgensternová et al., 2007), two open-ended questions (about satisfaction with and duration of their stays abroad), and two demographic questions (gender and age). 105 questionnaires were collected from 5 seminars, comprising 37 men and 68 women. The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 25 years. The average age of the student was 22.72 (SD=0.92). These frequencies align with the typical distribution in the study programs at the faculty (Matysová, 2017). Considering nationalities, the majority was Czech.

The research aims to examine the Cultural Adaptability Test with the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) method. The test comprises 21 items consisting of contrasting statements; respondents select their answers using a five-point Likert scale. One question explicitly addressing mental health was removed from the test. (The test item reads verbatim: I consider myself a mentally unstable person); the rationale for removing such an item was based on the internal rules of the academic team teaching the compulsory course, and this item was evaluated as politically incorrect. Altogether, 20 questions from the following five areas were used: A) long-term experiences with foreign cultures (questions A1, A2, A3); B) emotional pleasure associated with foreign cultures (questions B1, B2, B3); C) past experiences similar to culture shock (questions C1, C2, C3); D) personality traits such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and perceived meaningful life (questions D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6); E) mental health (questions E1, E2, E3, E4, E5).

In addition to the cultural adaptability test, students were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with their stay abroad and the duration of their stay in the form of two open-ended questions. The format of open-ended questions was chosen to evoke a spontaneous feeling associated with exchange mobility or international internship. Most of these mobilities and internships do not last more than five months, which coincides with the first stage of acculturation, the honeymoon phase. Therefore, it was assumed that the responses would predominantly reflect positive emotions, which was eventually proved. Prevailing responses were positive, denoting degrees of satisfaction or mixed emotions. However, negative feelings were indicated with a simple word, such as negative or dissatisfied. Responses about satisfaction were therefore coded on a scale of 0 (dissatisfied or other negative comments), 1 (mixed or neutral comments), 2 (satisfied, fairly satisfied, somewhat satisfied), and 3 (very satisfied, enthusiastic). The students were also asked about the duration of their stays abroad during their studies, with responses coded and converted to an ordinal scale: 0 (did not go abroad), 1 (up to 3 months), 2 (4-5 months), 3 (6 months to 2 years), 4 (more than 2 years). These asymmetric intervals coincide with stages of the acculturation curve – honeymoon (euphoria), cultural shock, acculturation, and stable state (Hofstede et al., 2010; Zdražilová, 2017). The

questions were intentionally open-ended to explore students' international experience. Longer stays relate to foreign students enrolled in Czech study programs. Since this is preliminary research, these questions are exploratory and are not the primary focus of this research.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used for the Cultural Adaptability Test. Initially, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) criterion was applied to assess the adequacy of the sample, resulting in the exclusion of the manifest variable D3, which had an MSA (Measure of Sampling Adequacy) of 0.463. In question D3, the majority of students either strongly agreed (1) or agreed (2) with the statement: Every human culture creates its own rules and behaviors, with an average answer of 1.94 (SD=0.84). The low variability of the responses to item D3 implies its low contribution to the diagnostic purpose of the instrument concerning the tested population. The high D3 rating might be interpreted as corresponding with the field of study and aligning with one of the main goals of the Faculty of International Relations, which is internationalization. Recognizing cultural differences is an essential prerequisite for this goal. In the case of different populations (such as students studying at another faculty, the general population of TNCs' employees, etc.), the high awareness of cultural specifics is not to be automatically assumed.

Tab. 1 EFA Adequacy after the removal of D3 (n=105)

KMO	MSA	KMO	MSA
Overall MSA	0.712	D1	0.805
A1	0.706	D2	0.660
A2	0.553	D4	0.661
A3	0.744	D5	0.683
B1	0.594	D6	0.703
B2	0.743	E1	0.563
B3	0.800	E2	0.783
C1	0.674	E3	0.683
C2	0.827	E4	0.692
C3	0.733	E5	0.715

Bartlett's test

X ²	Df	p
434.095	171.000	< .001

Source: own research

After excluding item D3, the overall MSA increased from 0.703 to 0.712, as seen in Table 1. Additionally, Bartlett's test was significant, which supports the use of exploratory factor analysis. Horn's parallel analysis was applied for factor estimation, and after interpreting the corresponding scree plot, two factors were identified. This contradicts the fundamental concept of the analysed cultural adaptability test, where the authors hypothesized five constructs (respectively factors), which can be seen from the items' non-alphabetical order. The following Table 2 displays the corresponding factor loadings and their uniqueness. For clarity, the order

of items is chosen based on the magnitude of the factor loadings as they relate to the two factors (in bold).

Tab. 2 Factor Loadings (n=105)

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
B2	0.707	-0.010	0.507
A1	0.705	-0.398	0.620
D1	0.553	0.107	0.625
A2	0.473	-0.184	0.827
C2	0.473	0.146	0.687
C3	0.449	0.034	0.782
D2	-0.012	0.505	0.751
D5	-0.102	0.489	0.800
E3	-0.130	0.455	0.834
E4	-0.024	0.442	0.814
D4	0.105	0.400	0.788
A3	0.304	0.364	0.667
B1	0.199	0.163	0.901
B3	0.062	0.399	0.812
C1	0.248	0.107	0.901
D6	0.268	0.257	0.794
E1	0.008	0.384	0.849
E2	0.341	0.390	0.601
E5	-0.062	0.376	0.878

Source: own research

The applied rotation method is Promax; both factors are correlated ($r=0.49$). Table 2 shows factor loadings higher than 0.40 in bold, which can be considered sufficiently strong factor loadings. The EFA revealed two latent variables (two factors); the first one including the following manifested variables B2, A1, D1, A2, C2, and C3; the second one including D2, D5, E3, E4, and D4. The uniqueness of these selected 11 manifested variables does not exceed 0.9, which can be considered satisfactory. As the remaining eight items (manifested variables) have weak factor loadings, they are not considered in further analysis.

Six items of the first factor (B2, A1, D1, A2, C2, C3) encompass positive experiences with foreign cultures, change, and openness towards foreign cultures and toward people in general. Cronbach's alpha for this latent variable is 0,70 (McDonald's ω 0,70). Five items of the second factor (D2, D5, E3, E4, D4) suggest that the individual has well-developed abilities in personal growth, conscientiousness, practical thinking, social adaptability, and respect for the autonomy of others. Cronbach's alpha for this latent variable is only 0,52 (McDonald's ω 0,52). To discuss the possible usage of the Cultural Adaptability Test, we must conclude that the originally proclaimed five latent constructs (latent variables A, B, C, D, E) were not identified with EFA. However, the first factor indicating openness to people and change with acceptable reliability ($\alpha=0,70$) can be used to develop a new cultural adaptability test.

The data were further analysed with Pearson's correlations. Table 3 shows those items from the Cultural Adaptability that significantly correlated with the length of stay and satisfaction with the international experience.

Tab. 3 Pearson's Correlations (n=105)

Variable		Satisfaction	Length	B2	B3	C2	E2	E3
1. Satisfaction	N	—						
	Pearson's r	—						
	p-value	—						
2. Length	N		—					
	Pearson's r	-0.163	—					
	p-value	0.295	—					
3. B2	n	55		—				
	Pearson's r	-0.451 ***	-0.231 *	—				
	p-value	< .001	0.026	—				
4. B3	n	55		105	—			
	Pearson's r	-0.382 **	-0.278 **	0.118	—			
	p-value	0.004	0.007	0.232	—			
5. C2	n	55		105	105	—		
	Pearson's r	-0.159	-0.230 *	0.391 ***	0.214 *	—		
	p-value	0.247	0.027	< .001	0.028	—		
6. E2	n	55		105	105	105	—	
	Pearson's r	-0.208	-0.240 *	0.281 **	0.190	0.282 **	—	
	p-value	0.128	0.020	0.004	0.052	0.004	—	
7. E3	n	55		105	105	105	105	—
	Pearson's r	-0.276 *	0.071	0.142	0.093	0.168	0.077	—
	p-value	0.041	0.497	0.147	0.347	0.087	0.436	—
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001								

Source: own research

The table shows that 55 respondents participated in a stay abroad and reported satisfaction with the stay. Items B2 and B3 are the most interesting, in this regard; both relate to positive associations with a foreign cultural environment. B2 item of the Cultural Adaptability test reads verbatim: When I think of a long-term stay abroad, I imagine it more as an interesting challenge rather than an unacceptable problem. B3 item of the Cultural Adaptability Test reads verbatim: I perceive the words Mokele mbembe as pleasantly exotic rather than quite unpleasant. The correlation between B2, B3 and satisfaction can be interpreted in compliance with the strategy of expatriation. In the theoretical section, we have mentioned the typological model of self-initiated expatriates, including mercenary, explorer, architect, and refugee types. Selmer and Lauring (2012) found a significant association between explorer reasons

(challenge, adventure, new experiences, etc.) for academic expatriation and job satisfaction. Similarly, in our research, satisfaction with the exchange mobility or international internship is correlated with challenge and exotic associations. Our research thus indicates that explorer reasons are predictors of satisfaction with international mobility or internship in the FIR VŠE students' population.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical and research part of this paper could serve as a good starting point for developing a cultural adaptability test aimed at students of the Faculty of International Relations. The research part demonstrated the unsuitability of the test from the intercultural psychology textbook; however, two factors were identified that, along with conclusions from scientific articles, can guide the creation of test items. The Cultural Adaptability Test's originally proposed five latent constructs, which were not identified in our research using exploratory factor analysis. The first revealed factor, which indicates openness to people and change and has acceptable reliability ($\alpha=0.70$), can be used as a unique construct in a new cultural adaptability instrument. Our research shows that satisfaction with exchange mobility or international internships correlates with challenges and exotic word associations, which coincides with explorer reasons that predict satisfaction with expatriation.

International student stays are a specific type of foreign stay that, on the one hand, simulate expatriation but, on the other hand, differ significantly from expatriation in many ways. Students' international mobilities and internships often last one semester, which means they overlap with the first stage of acculturation. The honeymoon phase might lead to misinterpretation of the stay abroad and can strengthen self-efficacy. On the one hand, the effects of self-fulfilling prophecies in emotional experiences related to future careers abroad can be positive. On the other hand, it is still necessary to prepare students for culture shock as a normal phase of acculturation abroad. Additionally, the commonly cited acculturation curve may not accurately reflect the experiences of self-initiated, especially explorers, who might experience prolonged euphoria. SIE is a relatively new phenomenon with unexploited potential, whereas the acculturation curve, considering its origin, is to be rather assumed as the development of assigned expatriates' acculturation. The differentiation between the acculturation of SIEs and assigned expatriates might be the subject of further research.

The factors discussed in Czech literature on international management, such as extraversion and mental health, are often defined too generally and can be misleading. Very few studies thoroughly examine the validity and reliability of instruments used in intercultural training, particularly their predictive validity. The literature review highlights studies assessing successful expatriation through variables such as job satisfaction, work performance, work effectiveness, and international job assignments. Managerial literature identifies early return and unsuccessful repatriation as signs of failed expatriation. Further research could also examine the analogies of these variables in the academic and study context.

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