

The Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) predicts adjustment above and beyond personality and general intelligence

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Abstract

Recent research has shown that the psychological skills assessed by the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) can predict adjustment, above and beyond what is already accounted for by personality. The purpose of this study was to examine if the skills tapped by the ICAPS can predict adjustment above and beyond that accounted for by both personality and general intelligence, and whether intelligence can predict adjustment above and beyond skills and personality. International students completed a battery of instruments including the ICAPS, a personality measure, and several adjustment indices. In a separate session they also completed a measure of general intelligence. The results indicated that the ICAPS did predict adjustment independently of both personality and intelligence, but that intelligence did not.

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1. Introduction

Intercultural adjustment and adaptation are more important today than ever before. Although the difference between them is often blurred, it is important to distinguish between them. On one hand adaptation is based in the sociocultural domain (Ward, 2001); i.e., it refers to the process of altering one's behavior to fit in with a changed environment or circumstances, or as a response to social pressure. On the other hand, adjustment refers to the subjective experiences that are associated with and result from attempts at adaptation, and that motivate further adaptation. Adjustment involves a wide range of experiences, including self-awareness and self-esteem (Kamal & Maruyama, 1990), mood states (Stone Feinstein & Ward, 1990), and health status (Babiker et al., 1980; all cited in Ward, 2001). Brislin (1993) identified three factors of adjustment, including (1) having successful relationships with people from other cultures; (2) feeling that interactions are warm, cordial, respectful, and cooperative; and (3) accomplishing tasks in an effective and efficient manner. Gudykunst, Hammer, and Wiseman (1977) included the ability to manage psychological stress effectively. Black and Stephens (1989) identified adjustment involving daily activities, interpersonal relations, and work.

In this paper, we examine the psychological factors that contribute to intercultural adjustment. Previous research has identified a host of such factors (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Within this genre, our work has used the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS), which can predict intercultural adjustment measured in a variety of ways, including self-, peer, and observer reports, and behavioral tasks (Matsumoto, LeRoux, Bernhard, & Gray, 2004; Matsumoto et al., 2001). The ICAPS was based on the assumption that intercultural conflict is inevitable, and that one of the keys for adjustment is the ability to manage conflict well. Four constructs are measured by the ICAPS: emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking (Matsumoto et al., 2003). Of these, emotion regulation appears to be especially important; it allows individuals engaged in conflict to manage their emotional reactions, affording them to seek and internalize new cognitive structures that reduce conflict and build interpersonal and intercultural relations. We view these constructs as psychological skills because they can be trained and change over time (McKenzie, Matheson, McKaskie, Hamilton, & Murray, 2000; Russell, Chu, & Phillips, 2006).

Personality also contributes to adjustment (Gough, 1986; Lazarus, 1963), and recent studies involving the Big Five personality traits (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness) have continued to provide support for these relationships (Costa & McCrae, 1980; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Heady & Wearing, 1989; Lucas & Fujita, 2000; Watson & Clark, 1992) For example, Robins, Tracy, Trzesniewski, Potter, and Gosling (2001) examined the relationship between traits and self-esteem on a sample of 326,641 individuals who participated in an online study. The five dimensions cumulatively accounted for about 34% of the variance of self-esteem, and this finding was robust across different age groups, gender, social class, ethnicity, and nationality. Personality traits predict intercultural adjustment as well (Matsumoto et al., 2004, 2001).

Another individual-level variable that may be related to adjustment is general intelligence. Although several definitions of intelligence exist (Gardner, 1993; Sternberg, 1985), it generally refers to a host of mental abilities, such as problem solving, reactivity, spatial perception, mental flexibility, verbal knowledge, and abstract reasoning. Sternberg (2004), in fact, defines intelligence as the mental abilities necessary for adaptation, and if

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