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CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING AND CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Proposing an Optimal CCT Program

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This paper is dedicated to my parents whose love and support
has got me where I am today.

Abstract

Title: *Cross-cultural training and cultural adjustment: Proposing an optimal CCT program.*

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Abstract: The increasing development of international business has had a direct impact on global mobility, making the relocation and cross-cultural adjustment of immigrants, migrants and expatriates, an urgent matter. Crossing national borders can be a stressful process and unsuccessful adjustment to the new cultural environment and workplace may result in failure both for the individual and the host organization. Factors such as culture shock, language incompetence, ambiguity or lack of network and organizational support to name a few, pose significant challenges to the individuals' adjustment. A way to lessen the risk for ineffective adjustment has been cross-cultural training programs, which, if designed and applied appropriately, can facilitate one's cultural adjustment in a new country. This paper investigates immigrants', migrants', and expatriates' experiences with regard to the challenges they faced in the new country, the factors that facilitated their adjustment and the aspects they consider significant for support during the relocation process. Considering the results and previous literature a model for an optimal cross-cultural training program is suggested that aims at covering all the aspects of relocation and seeks to improve and facilitate one's cross-cultural adjustment.

Keywords: cross-cultural training, cross-cultural adjustment, intercultural competence, intercultural communication, language training, acculturation, organizational support, immigration, migration, expatriation.

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1. Introduction

The ever-increasing internationalization of business has had a direct effect on the escalation of global mobility (Okpara and Kabongo 2011). Migration, immigration or international assignments require individuals to spend a short, long or indefinite amount of time in a culturally unfamiliar environment and multicultural workplaces. However exciting it might be meeting a new culture, new people, different living conditions and environments, it is also a difficult and emotionally straining process for many. The unfamiliar environment, communication failures or other differences might often lead to individuals experiencing what is called ‘culture shock’ (Hua 2019: 85). Culture shock has a negative impact not only on individuals’ psychology, but also on a physical level, often causing insomnia, fatigue or depression (Hua 2019:85).

In an unfamiliar cultural environment, immigrants, migrants or expatriates face numerous challenges and often suffer from cultural shock and its implications, which usually lead to failure to evolve professionally and to adjust effectively to the new country. Previous research (e.g., Farcas and Gonçalves 2017; Cerdin, Dine and Brewster 2014) has focused on the challenges individuals face in the new culture and it is suggested that the difficulties range from linguistic, cultural and social barriers to climate and organizational ones. These challenges not only add to the individuals’ difficulty to culturally adjust to the new environment and lifestyle, but have also been proven very costly for the host organizations as well, owing to premature returns or international assignment failures. (Lenartowicz et al. 2014:1697-1698). According to Black et al. (1991:291) a considerable percentage of American employees sent to international assignments return home prematurely because of their failure to adjust. These premature returns have been found to cost a company around USD 100.000. Additionally, around fifty percent of expatriates with compensation packages amounting to USD 250.000 annually, who stay at their international assignments, are considered by their host organizations ineffective or hardly effective at their work (Black et al. 1991:291 citing Copeland et al. 1985).

The consequences of failure to culturally adjust to the new country have shifted the focus on ways to appropriately prepare before the departure, to improve one’s chances to smoothly adjust to the new status quo. This has led to the development of cross-cultural training programs (CCT) in the field of international management, which aim at cultivating cross-

cultural competence in individuals who are about to cross national borders and work abroad. An extensive body of research on CCT programs has proved that if designed and applied properly, considering a variety of factors that affect cross-cultural adjustment, CCT can be helpful and effective towards immigrants, migrants and expatriates' cultural adjustment. Okpara and Kabongo (2011) confirmed the advantages CCT programs offer to individuals' adjustment by conducting research on the adjustment of expatriate managers in Nigeria. Similarly, Qui and Baruch (2010) investigated the adjustment of expatriate managers in China and found that CCT programs positively affected the expatriates' cultural adjustment. More research on the effectivity of preparation through CCT (Chenyang 2021) has proven the positive correlation of CCT programs with effective cultural adjustment and job satisfaction.

Organizational support is another matter that has been found to be a considerable factor that positively affects individuals' cross-cultural adjustment. According to the Perceived Organizational Support theory (POS) when individuals receive support and a form of reward from their organizations, they display better job performance, commitment and efficiency in the workplace (Eisenberg and Hutington 1986). Consequently, CCT programs offered by the host organization as a form of value and support towards the migrants or expatriates, can have a significant impact on individuals' personal, professional and cross-cultural adjustment and development.

The current study focuses on the experiences of immigrants, migrants and expatriates (IMEs) with regard to the most common challenges they face in an unfamiliar cultural environment, the preparation they tend to conduct before the departure as well as the factors that later facilitated their adjustment to the new country. As the paper investigates individuals who are currently employed or have been employed for a period of time abroad, the initialism 'IMEs' will be used to refer to immigrants, migrants or expatriates. After having investigated these factors and IMEs' experiences, the aim is to suggest an optimal CCT program that takes into consideration the multifaceted process of relocating to a new country and it is designed in accordance with the individuals' needs to enhance the program's effectiveness. The paper further aims at contributing to existing research on the challenges immigrants, migrants and expatriates face in the new cultural environment as well as on the effectiveness of cross-cultural training programs. The research questions of the paper are the following:

1. What are the most common challenges IMEs face when they relocate to work at a new unfamiliar cultural environment?

2. What are the most common factors that facilitate the IMEs' cultural adjustment to the new country after their arrival?

For the purposes of the current paper, a survey in the form of questionnaire was created, distributed and later completed by thirty-six participants. The questionnaire sought to gather the experiences of people who have worked or currently work abroad in an unfamiliar cultural environment. The participants answered questions related to the preparation they conducted before their departure, the challenges they faced when they arrived and the factors that facilitated their cultural adjustment after their arrival.

The introduction (section 1) is followed by a literature review (sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4) that focuses on *culture shock*, *cultural adjustment*, *challenges in the new country* and *cross-cultural training programs*. Next, the methodology (sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3) of the survey is described and right after the analysis (section 4), a discussion of the results (sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3) is provided. Thereafter, a part (sections 6.1, 6.2, 6.3) dedicated to the design of an optimal cross-cultural training program follows based on previous research and the results of the current survey. Lastly, a section about the limitations (section 7) of the research and a conclusion (section 8) are provided after that.

2. Literature Review

The following section reviews previous studies relevant to the topic. It is organized as follows: culture shock (2.1), cross-cultural adjustment (2.2), challenges in the new culture (2.3), cross-cultural training (2.4).

2.1. Culture Shock

Crossing national borders along with the subsequent process of adaptation in a new unfamiliar culture, can be an arduous, stressful and psychologically straining experience (Hua 2019: 84). According to Hua (2019:85) challenges caused by unfamiliar signs, communication difficulties, cultural differences may lead to experiencing culture shock. Winkelman (1994:121-122) mentions that cultural shock is a result of pressure and anxiety caused by the feeling of unfamiliarity with the new culture and by the feeling of loss of established sociocultural rules. The effects and implications of cultural shock are not restricted to a psychological level, but they extend to a physical level as well. Changes in sociocultural relationships affect the individuals physiologically, emotionally, interpersonally, cognitively and socially and they may often cause cognitive fatigue, role stress or identity loss (Winkelman 1994:121-122). In particular, individuals may exhibit psychological symptoms such as loneliness, lack of confidence and obsessive behaviors, or physical symptoms, such as tiredness or insomnia, and in combination with levels of stress, culture shock often leads to cultural fatigue (Hua 2019:85). There are three stages during culture shock, with the first being the “honeymoon” stage, where one feels satisfaction and eagerness experiencing something new. This soon changes into anxiety and feeling of rejection, during the second stage, often called “crisis stage” (Winkelman 1994:122) caused by discomfort in a culturally unfamiliar environment. With suitable practices and actions individuals move to the third stage, which is often referred to as “adaptation”, “resolution” or “acculturation” phase (Winkelman 1994:122). During that stage individuals return to satisfaction, and it is when people recover from culture shock and move to the process of cultural adjustment (Hua 2019:85).

In addition to that, there are several factors that affect the extent to which one experiences culture shock, such as control over the relocation, age, previous international experience, language skills, independence, tolerance, cultural distance or support network to name a few (Hua 2019:87). As Hua (2019:87) mentions there are some strategies that can help

individuals deal with culture shock and smoothly transition to the last stage of recovery. These strategies include studying the new culture, familiarizing with the new cultural system, learning basic communication (verbal and non-verbal) skills, developing intercultural friendships, preserving the home support network, keeping an open mind to different lifestyles as well as preparing to manage instances of failure.

2.2. Cross-cultural adjustment

Cross-cultural adjustment corresponds to the process of acclimation in an unfamiliar cultural environment (Chenyang 2021). Black (1988: 279-282) recognized three facets in cross-cultural adjustment. First, work adjustment refers to familiarity with the job duties and general workplace environment. Second, general adjustment entails familiarity with daily routines such as transportation, food, accommodation and healthcare. Third, the interaction adjustment includes familiarity with communication styles with host nationals, not only in the workplace but also in social life. According to Eschbach et al. (2001:272 citing Gullahorn and Gullahorn 1962), the cross-cultural adjustment process shapes a U-curve where culture shock is found at the bottom of the curve representing the strongest point of adjustment. Research has highlighted the effect of various factors on the degree of immigrants' cross-cultural adjustment. Okpara and Kabongo (2011: 24) describe three groups of factors that affect adjustment. The individual factors refer to possible previous international experience and the degree of adjustability, organizational factors include job related issues, organizational support, cross-cultural preparation and cultural distance between the home and host cultures, while contextual factors refer to the length of one's stay in the foreign country, social support and the organization's logistic support.

Fitzpatrick (2017: 284-288) further presents some factors that enhance one's prospects of adjusting to a new cultural environment. He starts by referring to individual differences which include previous experience in cross-cultural relocation that equips the individual with abilities to form realistic expectations, to deal with ambiguity or to show initiative towards building local networks from which one can receive support. Second, personal traits such as extroversion, empathy, openness, sincerity or stress tolerance are also integral to one's effective cross-cultural adjustment. Third, developing intercultural competence and skills for effective intercultural communication can provide the individual with adaptive skills that involve, among other things, flexibility and tolerance and secure cultural sensitivity and engagement in the host

culture. This can help the individual establish successful working relationships with people from various cultural and national backgrounds.

Fitzpatrick (2017: 284-288) goes on to distinguish intercultural competence from intercultural communicative competence, and states that apart from language fluency, which has been proven to work as a facilitating factor to one's cross-cultural adjustment, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence are also necessary requirements for successful adjustment. These involve the ability to understand the relationships between linguistic and contextual signs and appropriately interpret situational meaning in discourse. Next, the importance of sociocultural learning approaches is stressed, which entail learning the basic rules and behavioral routines of the host culture to function effectively. Finally, social support is mentioned as a crucial factor in cross-cultural adjustment (Fitzpatrick 2017:286-287). To elaborate on this, according to Fitzpatrick (2017:287), a significant body of research indicates that difficulties can be alleviated with an appropriate support framework provided by the host organizations. This has a positive impact not only on a psychological but also on a sociocultural level and may avert loneliness, stress and depression. According to Ong and Ward (2005) there are four functions of social support. To elaborate, first, emotional support includes empathy and compassion. Second, social companionship establishes the feeling of being part of a bigger group. Third, tangible assistance requires the provision of practical and material assistance in the form of services, resources and finances. Finally informational support acquaints the individuals with the life in the host culture and the new environment. However, there is an increasing emphasis on the role of the host organization to provide the required support resources in order to enable cross-cultural adjustment (Fitzpatrick 2017: 287).

As a part of cross-cultural adjustment, psychological conduct is another factor that affects immigrants' acclimation in the new culture (Okpara and Kabongo 2011:24). According to Selmer (2004:796-797) the psychological aspect of adjustment entails the "subjective well-being" of expatriates, who might be affected by depression, anxiety, tension or fatigue, due to cultural differences creating psychological barriers that inhibit the immigrants' adjustment. These psychological cultural barriers correspond to negative reactions towards a different culture which in turn is viewed as unfamiliar, strange or less good (Selmer 2004:796).

2.3. Challenges in the new culture

Eisenberg and Hutington (1986) initiated the theory of Perceived Organizational Support (POS), formed by research on employees' beliefs about being valued by their organizations. The theory linked the employees' increased commitment to the organization and greater work effort and efficiency with the expectation that the organization caters to covering employees' circumstantial needs and provides symbolic and material reward and praise (Eisenberg and Hutington 1986:504). In the ever-expanding global market, where organizations seek to enhance their presence abroad, organizational support for expatriates, migrants, immigrants and international workers becomes critical not only for the well-being of the employees, but also for the success of the international companies. Shah et al. (2021) explored the effect of organizational support on expats' families. First the researchers stressed the complexity and emotionally straining effect international assignments have on expatriates and their families, due to the unbalanced work-family relationship, and their deprivation of support by friends and family from their home country. The findings suggested that inadequate or inflexible organizational support towards expatriates and their families, during relocation, is a frequent cause for failure, while organizational assistance, guidance and facilitation throughout the transition process of the employees is positively associated with the latter's commitment to the organization and success in the international assignment.

Farcas and Gonçalves (2017) investigated the motivations and cross-cultural adaptation of Portuguese migrant workers in the United Kingdom through a qualitative analysis on participants' reflective interviews. According to the results twenty-eight out of fifty participants described their adaptation in the host culture an easy process owing to identifying with parts of the English culture, being strongly motivated to live in the UK, being supported by network with the same experience, accommodation, being satisfied with their jobs and being valued by the organization for their performance. The rest of the participants found it quite challenging to adapt mainly due to climate shock, food quality, difficulty in interacting with the locals caused by confusion about the host culture's social norms, language barriers, trouble finding housing and lack of support by family and partners.

Another study conducted by Cerdin et al. (2014), explored the relationship of motivation to migrate with the motivation to integrate in the French culture and subsequently the factors that affected the degree of qualified immigrant's (QI) success and adjustment in the new country. After a qualitative analysis of the QI's experiences, the researchers found that those

with the highest motivation to migrate found it easier to integrate in the host culture often through self-preparation and familiarization with the French culture and language, successful socialization with French colleagues or expectations of working in a multicultural environment, organizational support in the apartment search, resident and work permits or bank accounts. Yet, those who did not manage to successfully integrate in France usually mentioned obstacles created by unwelcoming behaviors, cultural distance and unfamiliarity with the host culture, unmet expectations after their arrival, difficulty learning the language, or the feeling of being unequal to their French colleagues. Overall, the findings stressed several factors that affect migrants' integration and willingness to integrate in the host culture as well as the significance of both the pre-arrival and post-arrival periods in the process of integration.

In more recent research, Thirlwall et al. (2021) examined the challenges expatriate nurses face during their work in the United Arab Emirates, through conducting in-depth interviews. The qualitative analysis of the data first showed that inadequate language skills in a multicultural and multilingual workplace caused many difficulties for the nurses with regard to misunderstandings with the patients, building rapport and holding conversations about medical procedures and treatment or conveying empathy and support to the patients as expected. In addition to that, ineffective translations and misinterpretations, not only between nurses and patients but also among nurses themselves, often led to exclusion of colleagues and failure to establish strong professional relationships (Thirlwall et al. 2021:442). Apart from language, the participants reported that as they were unaware of local cultural traditions, they failed to show expected behaviors to patients and their families, and as a result they failed to interpret the patients and families' needs. Other challenges that were reported were hierarchical distance, as some participants mentioned being treated differently by patients and their families because of their nationalities or socializing only with colleagues with same nationality as it was easier to understand each other's struggles (Thirlwall et al. 2021:437-441).

2.4. Cross-cultural training

Cross-cultural training is a way to inspire effective communication, engagement and business mindset in the context of an unfamiliar cultural environment (Qin and Baruch 2010:298). According to Waxin and Panaccio (2005: 3-4) the goal of cross-cultural training has been described as providing members that belong to a culture, with valuable knowledge about a target culture and facilitating their incoming adjustment to the new cultural environment. The

three techniques used in cross-cultural training, as mentioned by Okpara and Kabongo (2011:24 citing Breslin 1979) are the cognitive, affective and behavioral methods. The first one refers to non-interactive circulation of information about the host culture, the second corresponds to inspiring reactions to the individuals stimulated by real-life incidents participants might encounter in the host culture. The third method concentrates on enhancing the migrants' ability to adjust to the new cultural communication style and promote positive relationships with individuals of the host culture. Along with these methods come variables which take into account the degree of difficulty in communicating in the host culture, the job tasks and roles, length of stay, individual variables as well as the degree of active participation (Okpara and Kabongo 2011:24). Tung (1981:70-71) mentions five types of cross-cultural training programs: area studies programs, culture assimilator, language training, sensitivity training and field experiences. She further suggests that to be more effective, these programs should be used complementary to each other and be tailored based on the type of job and the host country.

As far as the effectiveness of cross-cultural training programs is concerned, Zakaria (2000:493-494) lists a set of advantages these training programs provide. Namely, organizations gain advantages, while migrants not only shift to culturally appropriate and flexible international management mindsets, but they also deal better with culture shock, uncertainty and stress produced by interactions with the host nationals. In addition to this, migrants also find better ways to manage the feeling of disorientation when found in a foreign unfamiliar environment. Moreover, it can contribute to reducing failure in assignments and provides cultural orientation to prepare for the new culture. A study conducted by Okpara and Kabongo (2011), focused on the impact intercultural training programs have on the adjustment of expatriate managers in Nigeria. The researchers divided the cross-cultural training in four types (general conventional, specific conventional, general experimental and specific experimental), and asked the participants to indicate on a scale, to what extent they received cross-cultural training prior their departure. In agreement with previous research, the study confirmed the positive impact cross-cultural training has on expatriates' adjustment, with the most effective type being the experimental training that focuses on the host culture. A training program tailored to the cultural distance, nature of assignment, occupation and duration of stay, should be part of the organizational support to avert failure. However, it was highlighted that the training, though successful in other areas, failed in compensating for the difficulty in the

psychological adjustment of the expatriates, caused by the loss of close friends and family members and dissatisfaction with host nationals.

In the same line, Qui and Baruch (2010) gathered empirical qualitative data to investigate the importance of cross-cultural training in Chinese firms. After analyzing the psychological contract, family package, cross-cultural training, free choice to accept or reject the offer, career attitude, career success, organizational commitment and performance of eighty-two expatriates, they found that employees showed difficulty in succeeding in China because they failed to understand the Chinese company's needs. Cultural difference was a substantial factor that affected the expatriates' success in China, while psychological contract, family package, free choice and protean career were closely related to successful performance and job satisfaction. Further, it was found that better cross-cultural training organization would increase the rates of job satisfaction. The researchers concluded that adding cross-cultural training to those who did not receive it, would enhance the expatriates' adjustment and job performance. Chenyang (2021), performed a meta-analysis of independent studies between 1991 and 2021, on cross-cultural training effectiveness. The research confirmed the positive association of cross-cultural training with adjustment, cultural intelligence and job performance. It is worth mentioning that there was a closer relationship of training and adjustment in an in-country stage rather than pre-arrival, thus making it necessary to further investigate the impact of the continuation of cross-cultural training in post-arrival stage.

Eschbach et al. (2001) conducted a study on American expatriates, to investigate the effectiveness of cross-cultural training to adjustment. The researchers used a mail survey and evaluated the cognitive, affective, experiential cross-cultural training and language training the expatriates had received from the host organization or that had been self-initiated. The results showed that cross-cultural training reduced not only the intensity of the culture shock, but also the time to adjust and become familiar with the new cultural environment. More than that, the findings indicated that the expatriates performed better at their jobs during the international assignment. By and large strong correlations were found between productivity and skill development, interaction adjustment and general adjustment, as well as between families' general adjustment and expatriate's adjustment. The researchers came to the conclusion that it is beneficial for the organizations to provide integrated cross-cultural training to expatriates to assure a fruitful and completed international assignment (Eschbach et al 2001:285-286).

Following the same train of thought, Oh and Jang (2021) conducted interviews in nine South-Korean self-initiated expatriates in Vietnam, who had received a program of cross-cultural training (OEA programs) provided by their host organization. After their qualitative analysis, they found that the program had helped the workers' adjustment in the Vietnamese culture and work environment in various areas. In particular, the program helped them to learn essential skills that decreased the intensity of cultural shock, to build networks through introducing them to alumni, to see their imminent expatriation as an opportunity of "entrepreneurship" (Oh and Jang 2021:25) and to explore the new culture. Additionally, the research highlighted that workplace learning after the expatriates' arrival played an equally significant role in the people's sociocultural adjustment, rendering necessary the continuation of training and learning after the arrival.

3. Methodology

This section describes the methodology of the research. First it presents the way data was collected (3.1), information about the participants follows (3.2), and finally the directed content analysis method is described (3.3).

3.1. Data collection

A survey in the form of a questionnaire was used for the purpose of this research (see Appendix). The questionnaire included two parts and ten questions in total. The first part (Appendix A) aimed at gathering demographic information about the participants (age, country of origin and country/-ies they have worked/work), while the second part (Appendix B) concentrated on participants' personal experiences regarding their working and living in a host culture. The questions were generated based on previous research papers that have focused on similar subjects and research questions. (Oh and Jang 2021; Farcas and Gonçalves 2017; Thirlwall et al. 2021). Question 4 specifically aimed at gathering information about the frequency of cross-cultural training programs and the means of preparation participants use before arriving in a new culture. Questions 5 and 6 focused on information about people's challenges in the new unfamiliar environment and the extent to which these affected their work and mood, while questions 7 and 8 asked for a reflection on the factors that helped them adjust after their arrival in the new country. Lastly, questions 9 and 10 sought to shed some light on the assistance immigrants wish for in order to better adjust in an unfamiliar and culturally new environment. Two out of seven questions of the second part were open-ended, whereas the rest included some examples, in a multiple-choice fashion, where more than one box could be checked, to help the participants identify relevant issues. Additionally, every question had the option of 'other' so that the participants are free to add any new information that may prove useful to the results.

3.2. Participants

The target group was people who have been employed, or currently work abroad, in a cultural environment different than their home country. The gender variable was purposefully omitted, as previous research (Selmer and Leung 2003; Koveshnikov et al. 2014) has shown that it

could be a considerable factor that may affect people's adjustment, thus it is beyond the scope and time constraints of the current research paper. The survey was created in a Google Form and the link was distributed through social media channels to reach out to as many people as possible. The platforms that were used for the distribution of the survey were *Instagram*, *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* and in the description of the survey viewers were encouraged to further promote it in case they know individuals who fit the description of the target group. Thirty-six (36) participants completed the survey in a time span of around one month.

3.3. Directed content analysis

To analyze the data, a qualitative approach was adopted, namely directed content analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1281) a directed content analysis approach aims at corroborating or further developing previous theories and existing frameworks. Additionally, this deductive approach can offer predictions about variables or the correlations among them. The analysis can be carried out using two strategies. The first one requires predetermined categories and classification of relevant text and data under the respective categories, while any uncategorizable text acquires a new category code. The second strategy is carried out by categorizing along with the analysis of emerging data and leaving the uncategorizable groups of data for later identification in order to decide whether they represent an important new category or a subcategory of an existing code (Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1281-1282). To ensure validity, trustworthiness and unbiased results, the second strategy was adopted, where uncategorizable data are examined later in the analysis—to determine if they represent a significant new category. To be more specific, each question of the survey is analyzed separately, and thematic categories derive both from the multiple-choice options and the answers of the participants.

4. Analysis

This section provides a thorough analysis of the data that derived from the questionnaire that was completed by the participants of the survey. The analysis starts with the fourth question of the questionnaire and ends with the tenth question. At the end of the analysis a summary of the finding and the derived thematic categories is provided.

As mentioned in section 3.1, the first three questions concerned participants' age, country of origin and country of residence and work. Therefore the analysis here focuses on the second part of the questionnaire. To begin with, question 4 regarded the ways immigrants prepared for the host culture before their departure. In Figure 1 the distribution of the participants' answers is presented. Most of the participants (twenty-two) received information from friends, relatives or partners, who presumably were familiar with the host culture and provided information by their personal experiences. Seventeen participants did self-preparation while fewer (four) participants received cross-cultural training and had previous international experience. Participant 19, who came from Finland and worked in the U.S. mentioned "*Training from an English-speaking family friend, English language (school) classes, plus previous trips to the U.S.*", an answer which fits under the categories of information from friends, self-preparation and previous international experience respectively. Consequently, four categories emerge from this question: information from network, self-preparation, cross-cultural training and previous international experience. Receiving information from network was found to be the most significant factor that contributed to the people's preparation before arriving in the new country.

4. In what way did you prepare for the new culture before your departure? (You may choose more than one)

36 responses

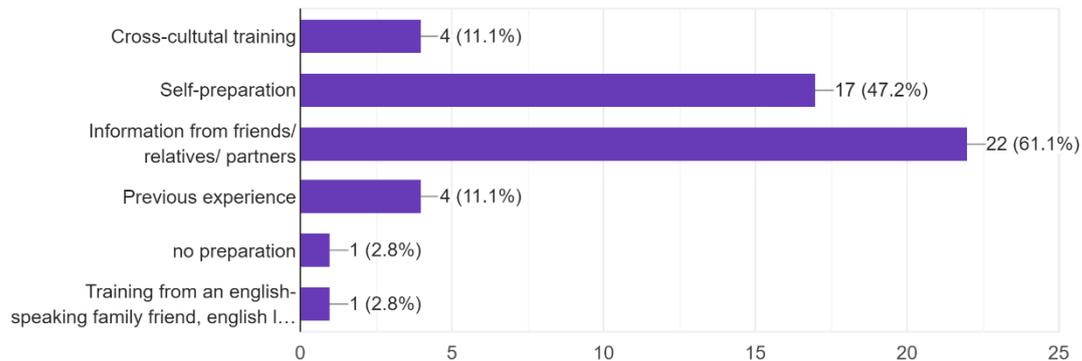


Figure 1. Question 4: *In what way did you prepare for the new culture before your departure?*

Question 5 focused on the biggest challenges people faced after their arrival at the new country. Figure 2 shows the allocation of the answers the participants offered. Twenty-nine participants reported language barriers, eighteen reported separation from family and friends as a major challenge in the new culture. Following that, differences in climate and food quality and habits were factors that were challenging for the immigrants' adjustment in the new country. Of course, this could also be related to the distance between the participants' country of origin and country of residence as the differences in climate and food might vary significantly. For instance, most of the participants who selected this option came from warm countries such as Greece, Lebanon, Egypt or Syria and worked in northern countries with significantly different climate, such as Sweden, Canada or Scotland. Next, thirteen participants mentioned finding accommodation as a big challenge and equally as many found it hard to understand cultural differences and dealing with misunderstandings of such nature. Twelve participants opted for difficulty building network in the new country and the same number opted for uncertainty about work duties in the new workplace. Ten people referred to cost of living in the new country as a challenge, while eight participants regarded the visa and resident permits as a barrier and five chose the relocation process in general as a difficulty. Two participants who completed the 'other' option mentioned racism or racist boss as a big challenge in the new culture. In sum the categories that emerge from this question are the following: language barriers, separation from family and friends, climate and food, building network, cultural

misunderstandings, accommodation, uncertain work duties, cost of living, relocation process (including visa and resident permits) and racism.

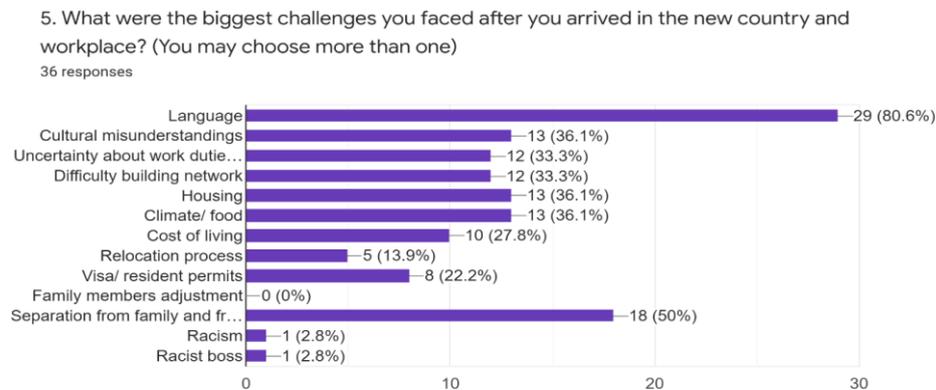


Figure 2. Question 5: *What were the biggest challenges you faced after you arrived in the new country and workplace?*

Question 6 asked whether the aforementioned challenges people faced in the new country affected them psychologically or professionally. The participants' answers are displayed in Figure 3. Participant 32 from Liberia who worked in Sweden mentioned that: *"They affected my zeal for studies [and] work for some time"*. Accordingly, participant 5 from Germany who worked in Norway, later mentioned: *"The weather and the darkness (cold and minimal hours of sunlight) really affected my mood and attitude towards work. It was hard to get up when it is completely dark and finish work in the afternoon/noon when it is dark again. Since the place I worked was pretty remote, I also had a hard time connecting to people outside of my workspace."* Participant 35 who was originally from Greece and worked in Sweden also referred to climate differences and instrumental barrier to their adaptation. For example the participant later mentioned: *"The most difficult part for me was the climate change. I come from a country full of sun and temperature over 15 degrees the most [sic] of the year. In Sweden especially the winter months from November till February it is difficult to adjust to the darkness and cold weather. When the first sunrise is after 9 o'clock in the morning and the sunset before 16.00 pm the only light that you see is the artificial light in the working environment so no vitamin D and no boost for motivation to work."* In total, twenty participants claimed they were affected while five participants reported they were affected in a lesser degree. Two participants mentioned that they experienced a lot of stress and anxiety due to language barriers and

difficulty building network in the host culture. Participant 19 from Finland who worked in Sweden mentioned that: “*The beginning was very anxiety inducing. The language barrier and process of making new connections was very stressful.*”. It is worth mentioning that the twelve participants who reported that their motivation or psychology were not affected by the challenges they faced, were either self-prepared before their departure, informed by family and friends about the host culture, experienced in international environments or cross-culturally trained. Subsequently, they had received some kind of preparation that might have contributed to a smoother transition to the new culture. The categories that derive from this question are the following: affected, slightly affected, not affected, with the first having most answers.

6. Did these challenges affect you psychologically or your motivation to work?

36 responses

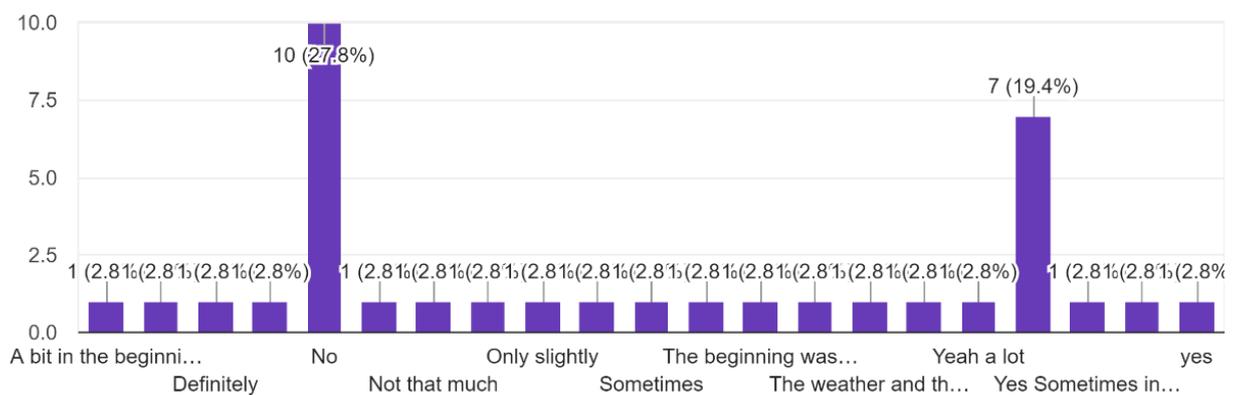


Figure 3. Question 6: *Did these challenges affect you psychologically or your motivation to work?*

Question 7 concentrated on the factors that facilitated the immigrants’ adjustment in the new country after their arrival. The percentages of the participants’ answers are presented in Figure 4. Twenty-seven participants reported they were supported by friends and coworkers. Eleven participants were helped by attending language courses, while five participants reported they were supported by their workplaces. Participant 14 from India who worked in Sweden mentioned that they were helped by developing “*cultural sensitivity training through youtube[sic]*”, while two others mentioned curiosity and keeping an open mind as a significant factor that contributed to their adjustment. Participant 18 from Greece who worked in Austria mentioned that “*skiing in the Alpes [sic]*” was a way to adjust in the new culture, bringing up

the category of engaging in local activities as a way to familiarize with the new culture and understand it. In addition to that, two other participants mentioned that meeting and interacting with other immigrants from the same or similar cultures was also a determining factor to their motivation to adjust to the new culture. Specifically participant 19 mentioned that: “*Coworkers and school mates who were also immigrants were helpful at the beginning, because there were people with similar experiences*”. Similarly, participant 35 wrote: “*After meeting new friends in my new area and especially from my origin county and more south and Mediterranean countries such as Italian Spanish and Indian people I saw that all of us have to adjust to this new life and new daily routine with all these difficulties. So, I felt more confidence to continue working and believing to this new life*”. Considering the people’s answers, apart from the categories of network, language and organizational support, three other categories emerged: cultural sensitivity -including self-initiated development of intercultural competence, engagement in local activities and creating support network. For the purpose of the current analysis, the term ‘*support network*’ refers to interacting with people with similar experience and it is distinguished from the network category, which corresponds to meeting locals and establishing new relationships in the new workplace and country.

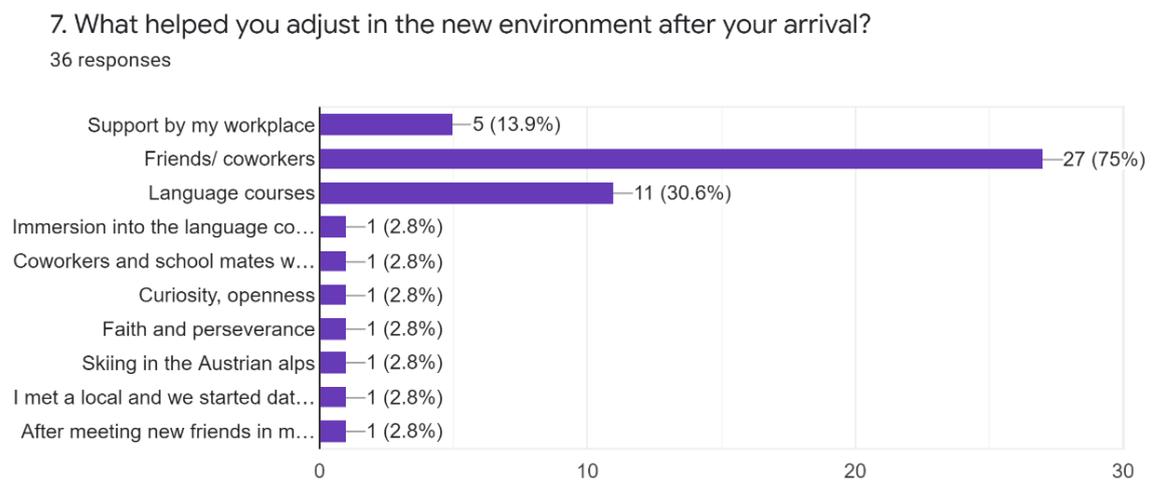


Figure 4. Question 7: *What helped you adjust in the new environment after your arrival?*

Question 8 was a yes-or-no question which asked for participants opinion on whether organizational support and relocation assistance would be helpful if provided by the host organization. As shown in Figure 5 below, most of the participants (23) responded positively, eleven responded ‘maybe’ while two answered negatively. The two participants who answered negatively in this question were from Germany and the United Kingdom and they worked in Norway and Sweden respectively. Participant 5 from Germany mentioned “*I think the cultural differences between Norway and Germany are minimal. I also think it heavily depends on the nationality/culture of your colleagues and social circle*”. Consequently, minor cultural difference between the two countries, as the participant experienced it justifies their negative answer at the current question. Participant 29 from the UK mentioned at a later question that “*I was 28 when I moved to Sweden and pretty bored in the UK. I saw moving here as a bit of an adventure, and discovering new things was part of that experience[...]*” . Also, in question 7 the participant mentioned they started dating a local and that helped her adjust to the new country. Therefore, it comes to the conclusion that their personal motivation to move to the new country as well as their smooth adjustment due to building network in the novel cultural environment could justify their negative answer to question 8.

8. Do you think it would be easier for you to adjust to the new country if your host organization provided cross-cultural training and relocation assistance before and during your arrival?
36 responses

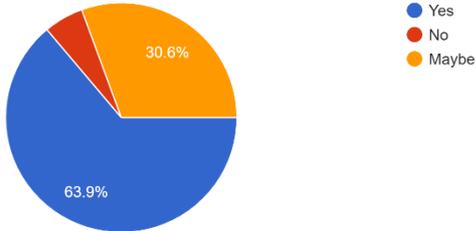


Figure 5. Question 8: Do you think it would be easier for you to adjust to the new country if your host organization provided cross-cultural training and relocation assistance before and during your arrival?

Question 9 concentrated on which parts of the migration process people consider most important to be assisted with. Figure 6 displays the allocation of the participants’ answers regarding the desired assistance that would facilitate the immigrants’ adjustment. It is important to note here that not all the participants answered this question, so in total there were thirty-three answers. In particular, eighteen participants referred to language training, sixteen voted

for accommodation, fifteen considered help finding a network, while eleven participants chose intercultural education. Specifically participant 35 from Greece who worked in Sweden, wrote: *“I think it would be nicer to have information regarding the new life before the arrival in the new country. The first thing is to provide free language courses to the colleagues so everyone can speak the same language, and no one can feel lonely in a foreign company. For example, Swedish people are so strong with keeping Swedish language as the main language in the working environment. Even if they can speak really good English, they want to speak their origin language, so the foreigners don’t feel confident in this situation”*. Considering the data, the emerging categories for this question were: language training, accommodation support, network building and intercultural education, as the most important areas with which migrants would require some support.

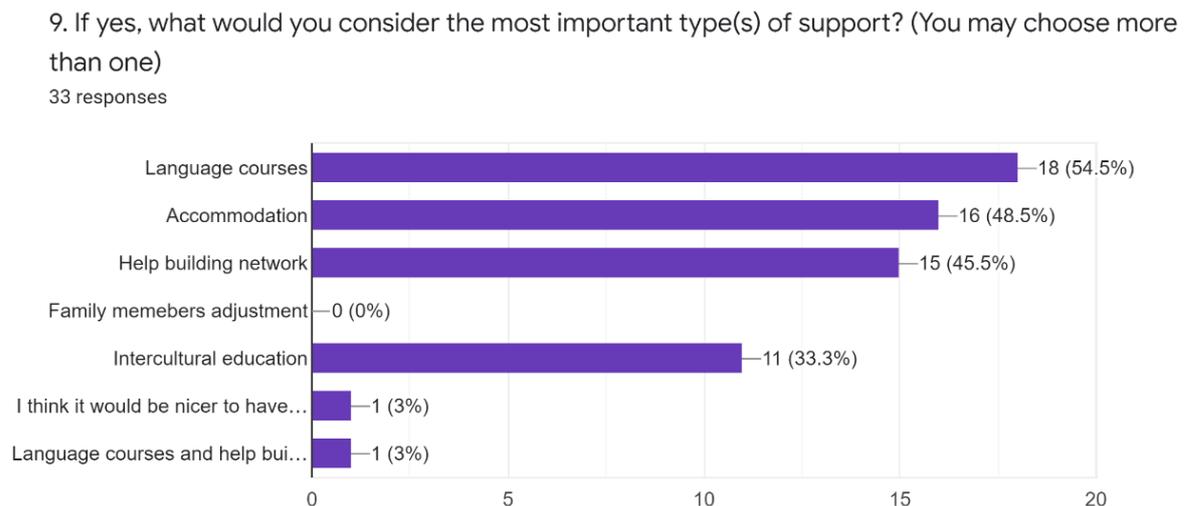


Figure 6. Question 9: *If yes, what would you consider the most important type(s) of support?*

Last but not least, question 10 asked whether the participants thought that better adjustment in the new culture would facilitate their motivation to work and live in the new country. Similar to the previous question, not all participants answered this part, and thirty-four responses were collected. As displayed in Figure 7 below, most of the participants (twenty-six) responded positively, while six participants answered no. The participants who answered negatively were requested to justify their answers. Participant 5 mentioned that *“the cultural differences between Norway and Germany are minimal. I also think it heavily depends on the*

nationality/culture of your colleagues and social circle and not necessarily on the country". Participant 9 reported that *"it's a self-learning process"* thus the need for organizational support would not make a difference. Participants 26 and 30 mentioned that *"It doesn't affect my motivation, if anything, it makes me more motivated to overcome the challenges"* and *"I was 28 when I moved to Sweden and pretty bored in the UK. I saw moving here as a bit of an adventure, and discovering new things was part of that experience. If I'd know too much before moving here it wouldn't have felt so new and exciting"* respectively. According to these participants the personal motivation to immigrate and willingness to meet the unfamiliar new culture are important factors that seem to facilitate the migrating experience and subsequent adjustment to the new country. Considering that, if we derive some thematic categories by the explanations given from the participants who answered negatively to question 10, the emerging categories are: small cultural distance, personal motivation and personality -including personal traits such as curiosity, openness, perseverance, tolerance and so on.

10. Do you think that if you were better prepared and adjusted in the new culture, you would have better motivation to work and live in the new country? If no, please explain.

34 responses

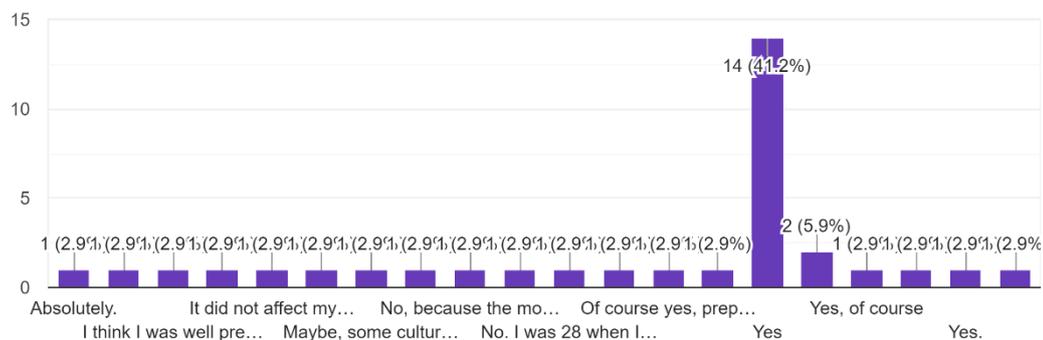


Figure 7. Question 10: *Do you think that if you were better prepared and adjusted in the new culture, you would have better motivation to work and live in the new country? If no, please explain.*

To summarize the findings presented in this section, concerning the ways people get prepared before they depart for the new country, the categories that emerged (from most frequent to least) were the following:

- (1) information from network

- (2) self-preparation
- (3) cross-cultural training
- (4) previous international experience.

Second, with regard to the biggest challenges people face in the new country, the most common difficulties were:

- (1) language barriers
- (2) separation from family and friends
- (3) climate/food
- (4) building network
- (5) cultural misunderstandings
- (6) accommodation
- (7) uncertain work duties
- (8) cost of living
- (9) relocation process
- (10) racism.

Concerning the extent to which participants were affected by these challenges the majority was (1) affected, some were (2) slightly affected, and few were (3) not affected. Focusing on people's experiences after their arrival, and particularly on what facilitated their later adjustment in the new culture, the derived categories, from most to least often, were:

- (1) network
- (2) language
- (3) organizational support

(4) cultural sensitivity

(5) engagement in local activities

(6) support network¹.

Regarding the areas people consider important to be supported with, the most common answers were (1) language training, (2) network building and (3) intercultural education. In the last question, which concerned whether migrants thought that better preparation and adjustment would result to boosted motivation to work and live in the new country, most of the answers were positive. However, we chose to focus on the categories emerging from the negative answers, based on the explanations provided. The categories were (1) small cultural distance, (2) personal motivation and (3) personality.

¹ Support network refers to establishing relationships with other migrants/immigrants and in general people with similar experience (section 4, p.12), and it is distinguished from network which refers meeting people in the new country in general.

5. Discussion

The following section provides a discussion of the findings that derived from the survey in combination with the research questions of the paper. It is organized as follows: research question 1 (5.1), research question 2 (5.2) and a discussion about IMEs' desired assistance (5.3).

5.1. Research Question 1

The first research question concerned the most common challenges immigrants, migrants or expatriates face after they have arrived at the host country. First, the most common challenge IMEs encounter in the new cultural environment is the language barrier. As suggested by the results, individuals tend to dedicate time to self-preparation which might entail doing some language courses for the destination country, and very few participants stated they had received cross-cultural training. Lacking language competence in the foreign culture can be a serious obstacle for the migrants in the new workplace. As participant 35 stated, language was an important means of communication in the workplace and lacking the competence led to exclusion by coworkers. Being excluded due to language may induce stress and anxiety to the migrant and not only intensify the feeling of loneliness but also decrease the feeling of belonging. In addition to that, the language barrier may also lead to discomfort in the new cultural environment which is a cause for cultural shock (Winkelman 1994:122), and an inhibit to their adjustment (Black 1988: 279-282). This result is in accordance with previous research that has shown the difficulty migrants face due to language barriers.

The second most common difficulty migrants tend to encounter is the separation from family and friends of the home country. As stated in the literature, the deprivation of support by family and friends of the home country has an emotionally straining impact on migrants' psychology and in combination with other factors, may lead to failure to adjust to the new workplace and country (Shah et al. 2021). The loss of the support network from one's home country adds to the loss of familiarity with established sociocultural norms, which is a factor that leads to cultural shock (Winkelman 1994:121). Further, lacking support by family and friends of one's home country has also been proven by Farcas and Gonçalves (2017), as a significant barrier to migrants' cultural adjustment.

Climate and food differences in the new country were also significant factors that affected the participants' cultural adjustment. As participants 5 and 35 mentioned (section 4), climate

differences between their home and host countries, affected not only their mood and psychology but also their motivation to work and professional development. Climate shock has also been confirmed by the literature (Farcas and Gonçalves 2017) as a factor that has a negative impact on individuals' psychology and cultural adjustment. Such differences can be linked to the causes of cultural shock, as they intensify the individual's feeling of unfamiliarity with the new country. Being aware of the geographical and climate differences between the home and host countries before one's departure, may prepare them about imminent challenges in the new cultural environment and help them find appropriate ways to manage such difficulties.

Next, finding accommodation was found to be similarly challenging for the participants. As mentioned by not only Cerdin et al. (2014), but also Farcas and Gonçalves (2017), having secure and satisfying accommodation or having received guidance and organizational support through the process, has been a great factor that facilitated the migrants' adjustment to the new cultural environment. On the contrary having to manage the accommodation process in an unfamiliar environment can be a stress inducing process and augment the feeling of being lost in the new country, yet another factor that could intensify the experience of cultural shock and inhibit cross-cultural adjustment.

Lastly, cultural misunderstandings, uncertain work duties, cost of living, trouble with the relocation process and racism were also reported as challenges by the participants, but in a lesser degree. These factors are too confirmed by the literature as contributing to the immigrants' difficulty to adjust to the host culture. Specifically, Okpara and Kabongo (2011) referred to work related issues as one of the factors that affected people's adjustment. What is more, Farcas and Gonçalves (2017) found that their participants struggled with interacting with the locals owing to confusion about the host culture's social norms which could lead to cultural misunderstandings, a factor that inhibited their adjustment to the new country. Thirlwall et al. (2021) also mentioned the impact of cultural misunderstandings on the expatriates' adjustment, as lacking cultural knowledge led to not treating patients and their families as it was expected by the host culture or to not establishing strong professional relationships with host nationals. Finally, Cerdin et al. (2014) stressed that unwelcoming behaviors and the feeling of being unequal to the locals had negative impact on the immigrants' acculturation process. Thirwal et al. (2021) also referred to some participants being treated differently by host nationals because of their nationality, which increased the expatriates' difficulty to integrate. It is worth mentioning that the participants of the current survey mentioned racism as a challenge they

encountered in the host culture which is an issue that has not been stressed enough in previous research. Subsequently intercultural competence is deemed necessary not only for the immigrants, but also for the members of the host organizations, to among other avert unwelcoming and racist behaviors that can deteriorate the psychological well-being of the employees and the relationships among them.

To summarize, according to the results of the current survey the greatest challenges that immigrants encounter in the new cultural environment are, in a waning order, language, lack of support by the home network, climate and food differences, accommodation, cultural misunderstandings, uncertain work duties, cost of living, relocation process, and racism. These results are confirmed by previous research that has highlighted the negative impact such factors have on individuals' cultural adjustment.

5.2. Research question 2

With regard to the second research question, which focuses on the factors that facilitated the IMEs' cultural adjustment after their arrival at the host culture, first it was found that the majority of participants was supported by building network in the new country. This does not only include new friends, but also coworkers and general connections IMEs made. As Hua (2019:87) has mentioned, establishing intercultural friendships in the new culture is a useful strategy to cope with culture shock. Furthermore, as a part of social support, building network has been found to be among the factors that facilitate the immigrants' adjustment (Okpara and Kabongo 2011: 24). This is also confirmed by Cerdin et al. (2014) where the participants of their research found it easier to adjust in the new culture through among others successful socialization with the host nationals. It is thus logical to infer that building a new network with host nationals or people who live in the host country, increases the development of familiarity with the new environment, and subsequently decreases the intensity or duration of culture shock.

The second most common factor that was found to facilitate IMEs' adjustment was language. Linguistic competence in the host culture was found to be the biggest challenge people encounter with significant consequences. Thus, it comes without saying that immersing into the country's national language not only does it facilitate the people's daily lives and affairs but also their relationships with the locals, their coworkers and their general network. More than that, by learning the language, one comes one step closer to getting familiar with the host

culture and increasing the feeling of belonging and decreasing the feeling of being lost in an unfamiliar environment surrounded by unfamiliar signs. Yet another way to ease the impact of culture shock and its implications. As the research by Cerdin et al. (2014) has shown, familiarization with the participants' host culture and language was among the facilitating factors to the individuals' cross-cultural adjustment.

Organizational support was found to be the third most common factor that helped immigrants adjust to the new country. Organizational support may include guidance through the relocation process, support for the family members' adjustment, practical display of appreciation towards their employees or establishment of a friendly and welcoming atmosphere to the new workplace. As mentioned in section 2.3., the Perceived Organizational Support (POS) theory explains that when employees feel they are being supported and valued by their organization, they display greater commitment to their professional activity. Farcas and Gonçalves (2017) further found that being valued by their host organization was one of the factors that helped immigrants adjust to the new cultural environment and workplace. Okpara and Kabongo (2011: 24) has further highlighted the positive impact organizational support has on cultural adjustment.

Developing cultural sensitivity, participating in and conducting local activities along with establishing relationships with people who share the immigration experience, had an equal amount of respondents in the current survey. Namely, participant 14 (section 4) mentioned that they tried to educate themselves and develop cultural awareness through YouTube channels, while participant 18 (section 4) mentioned that engaging in local activities helped them adjust to the new cultural environment. Even though these two factors had less respondents than the previously mentioned, they are important to be taken into consideration as parts of familiarizing with the host culture and in turn reducing the impact of culture shock and its consequences. Furthermore, as these factors have not been highlighted enough in the literature, they could be considered important variables to be further investigated as to their impact on the IMEs' cross-cultural adjustment. Meeting the new culture through exploring its geographical, natural and social areas can be a considerable way to appreciate and get familiar with the new country, which can later contribute to the individuals' smoother transition from the culture shock phase to cross-cultural adjustment. Regarding the establishment of relationships with the people who share the immigration experience, it is ratified by previous research. Specifically, Farcas and Gonçalves (2017) found that the participants who experienced a relatively easy cultural

adjustment to the host culture, among other maintained a support network with people who shared the immigration experience. Subsequently, establishing relationships with other immigrants who understand the challenges one faces when relocating in a new country, is regarded a facilitating factor that contributes to the process of adjustment.

To synopsise, the analysis of the data collected by the current survey showed that building network, learning the language of the host culture, being supported by the host organization, developing cultural sensitivity, engaging in local activities and establishing relationships with people who share the immigration experience were facilitating factors to the individuals' cultural adjustment. This is also confirmed by the literature and should be taken into consideration when designing and applying a cross-cultural training program.

5.3. Immigrants' desired assistance

Focusing on immigrants' desired assistance during their relocation to the new country, language training, network building and intercultural education were identified as important areas. In consistence with the literature, language competence is an important factor that can facilitate the immigrants' cultural adjustment and management of culture shock. Since network building has been the most common factor that participants mentioned to have contributed to their later adjustment in the new cultural environment, it is logical that it should be considered as an area to be supported with. Intercultural education has also been deemed important to be provided by the host organizations, as the lack of it might lead to negative consequences and challenges in a multicultural workplace (Braslauskas 2021:200).

It is also important to highlight that very few participants had received cross cultural training, whereas the majority of them had dedicated time to self-preparation before their departure. Taking into consideration the IMEs' thoughts, as well as the categories that emerged from the analysis of the results, it is logical to infer that a cross-cultural training program should consider all the different factors that on the one hand inhibit and on the other hand facilitate the individuals' cross-cultural adjustment, in order to be effective. Should the individuals receive an appropriately designed cross-cultural program that prepares them for the life and work in the culturally new environment, thus providing them with the guidance and support they need in the process of relocation, they would be better equipped and well aware of appropriate ways to function in unfamiliar or multicultural environments and later adjust to a new lifestyle and culture.

6. Designing a cross-cultural training program

Having reviewed the existing literature and with the completed analysis of the data collected through the survey, this section is dedicated to suggesting an optimal cross-cultural training program that aims to cover the potential needs of immigrants, migrants or expatriates. It is organized in the following way: cultural and intercultural training (6.1), cross-cultural training methods (6.2), an optimal cross-cultural training program (6.3).

6.1. Cultural and intercultural training

As mentioned before (section 2.4.) cross-cultural training has been proven to positively affect the cross-cultural adjustment of IMEs in the host culture. However not all CCT programs are equally effective (Lenartowicz et al. 2014). There are some factors that need to be considered such as the type of knowledge and competences they develop and the method with which they are applied. First, it is important to distinguish explicit from tacit knowledge, with the first referring to systematized factual knowledge easy to articulate and codify (Lenartowicz et al. 2014:1698). Tacit knowledge on the other hand requires people to experience a situation and learn from it. More than that, it is based on values and emotions and acquired through repeated experience and exposure to trials and errors. Subsequently, cultural knowledge is a combination of both explicit and tacit knowledge, but the tacit dimension is deemed imperative to successful cultural learning (Lenartowicz et al. 2014:1698-1700). Lenartowicz et al. (2014: 1712) proposed some cultural learning frameworks to enhance the effectiveness of CCT programs and suggested that the training process should include a variety of methods that are continuously evolving while improving the trainee's cultural knowledge in time. These cultural learning frameworks further agree on an interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge and that the outcome should be tacit knowledge. Thus, an effective cultural learning program should include cultural experience, sequential stages, continuous interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge, increased tacit knowledge and continuity of the cycle until the desired competence level is reached (Lenartowicz et al. 2014:1707). With regard to the continuity of the cycle, it is important to stress that CCT programs can be more effective if they continue after one's arrival to the host culture and new workplace, in order to reach the desired level of familiarity and

competence. As Chenyang (2021) found, there was a closer relationship between training and adjustment at an in-country stage, rather than at a pre-arrival stage.

Intercultural knowledge and competence are also necessary skills to be developed and incorporated into the cross-cultural training programs. However, first it is important to understand it. Intercultural competence entails one's willingness to accept differences at both social and cultural levels (Braslauskas 2021:198). The main components of intercultural competence are sets of cognitive, affective, behavioral and communicative traits that help the individuals function appropriately in intercultural contexts (Braslauskas 2021:198-199). At a multicultural workplace setting, inadequate intercultural competence may cause several issues in time planning and management, communication, work ethic, rules of conduct or subordinate-managerial relationships (Braslauskas 2021:200). To develop intercultural competence, linguistic, communicative and cultural competence are required. Linguistic competence requires the training in foreign languages, communicative competence entails learning about non-verbal signs of a culture, conversational norms, appropriate expression and interpretation of thoughts or acceptable communication distance (Braslauskas 2021:203). Lastly, cultural competence can be acquired through exposure to new knowledge and values of the foreign culture, via cultural sources such as literature, cinematography or politics (Braslauskas 2021:204).

6.2. Cross-cultural training methods

Research on CCT methods has shown that experiential (sometimes referred to as 'experimental') learning is considered the most effective method to apply cross-cultural training (Lenartowicz et al. 2014:1707). Zakaria (2000: 504) mentions that an experiential program can develop sensitivity and respect about different cultures to the individuals. Okpara and Kabongo (2011) confirm with their findings that experimental programs paint a more accurate picture of different aspects of the host culture and help the trainee immerse in it and understand it better. Moreover, through experiential learning, trainees can acquire valuable knowledge towards appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviors in order to establish successful intercultural relationships. Equipped with such skills, individuals can improve their affective and behavioral reactions and positively affect the psychological aspect of the effectiveness of a CCT program (Zakaria 2000: 505). In particular, the method includes role-play and simulation exercises, interactive language training and field trips. Through sharing experiences, creating mental

models and interacting with nationals of the host culture and others who bare cultural knowledge, individuals can socialize in that context, which can later help them acknowledge consequences of their actions in different cultural settings and prepare themselves to act accordingly in similar situations (Lenartowicz et al. 2014:1707).

Lenartowicz et al. (2014:1710-1711) suggest that a basic training program where time and financial resources are restricted should at least contain area briefings, literature reading, role-play exercises and simulations. When there is more time available it is important that case studies, lectures and films are incorporated into the program, whereas in case of more financial resources available a combination of the aforementioned elements is deemed most effective. In optimal scenarios where time and finance are available, combining factual training methods with interactive learning, language training and field trip experience, can lead to a high level of tacit knowledge and thus to maximization of the experimental training and effectiveness of the cross-cultural program (Lenartowicz et al. 2014:1712).

6.3. An optimal CCT program

Taking into consideration the findings of previous research along with the results and conclusions of the current survey, an effective CCT program should contain particular elements, and cater for several aspects of the general relocation process, to accomplish maximum competence and ensure for the individuals a smooth transition from the home to the host culture and sociocultural reality. First of all, it is suggested that the programs are designed and tailored to the individual assignment and occasion's needs. As we have seen cultural distance, length of stay abroad, time of notice for the relocation, time available before departure, motivation and other factors affect the degree of adjustability in migrants as well as the effectiveness of such programs. Therefore, it is important to adjust the CCT program based on different circumstances. It is further important to clarify that the program suggested corresponds to ideal circumstances where temporal and financial resources are available. Otherwise, the content of the program should be adapted to the available resources, maintaining at least a basic combination of tacit and factual knowledge development exercises. It is then up to the trainer to decide which aspects are deemed most important to be prioritized and covered during the training program. With these in mind, a CCT program should contain two phases, the pre-departure (PD) and the post-arrival (PA) phase. Figure 8 displays the structure of the suggested

optimal cross-cultural training program, with its phases, parts and general goals, which are later on presented and explained one by one.

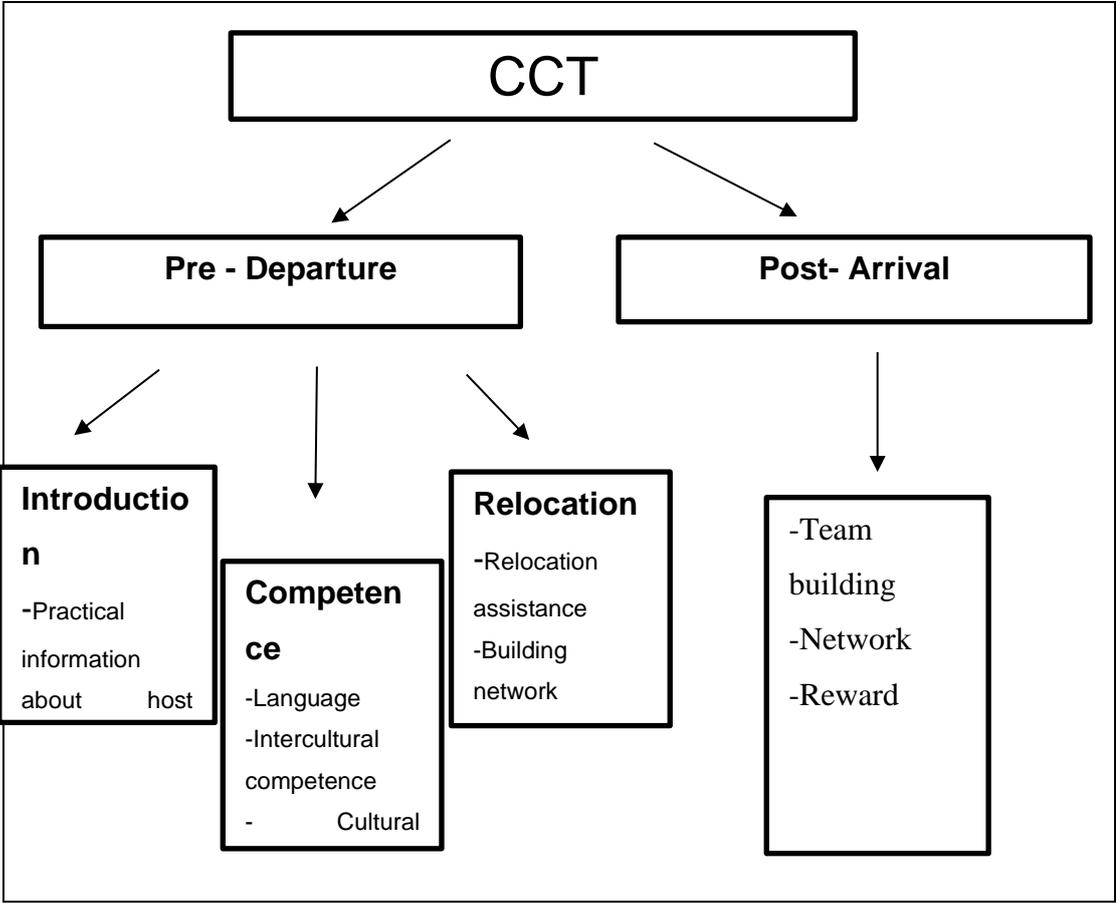


Figure 8. *Cross-cultural training program*

During the PD phase three parts of training should be incorporated, one that introduces the new country and culture (introduction), one that aims at developing intercultural knowledge and necessary skills required in a cross-cultural environment (competence) and one that provides practical assistance and support to the immigrant, migrant or expatriate (relocation). The introduction part aims at providing information about the geography, politics, economy, climate, food and general culture of the destination country in the form of explicit knowledge. This can provide the individuals with necessary information about the new environment and inspire curiosity to meet and explore further the destination. This set of factual knowledge can equip the individuals with practical information about particular aspects of the host country and prepare them to manage potential different climate, food or political conditions for example.

The competence part aims at developing tacit knowledge through providing language courses, intercultural training through literature, films, field trips and interaction with host nationals or other people with cultural knowledge and experience. In this part it is also important to include education about cultural shock, its stages and strategies that could facilitate the management of the shock, such as the importance of maintaining a support network from the home culture. This part can prepare individuals on a psychological level by being aware of the challenges they might have to deal with in the host country, or the expectations they should form about their new lifestyles. Moreover, to promote interaction with host nationals, it is suggested that the individuals come in contact with alumni of the host organization, which could offer them a head start to create a new network. On a competence level trainees will be equipped with practical skills and knowledge to appropriately interact in intercultural environments, to keep an open mind towards differences and better deal with cultural misunderstandings that might occur.

The relocation part aims at providing practical relocation assistance. First, as building network was among the most common challenges people face in the new culture, and also among the most common factors that facilitate individuals' adjustment, it is important that the host organization provides an ambassador that will support the migrant in the new workplace and culture. The support could be through providing information about the work duties, ethic and culture, local activities and experiences available in the new area, and through introducing the individual to future coworkers and support communities. This will help the individual feel more engaged, aware and prepared to build a new network in the country, thus it will help with loneliness or depression or other implications of cultural shock. In addition to that, the relocation part should include assistance with finding accommodation, assisting with the relocation of family members (if existing), arranging visas or residents permits if necessary, and providing guidance through administrative processes that follow relocation. The relocation part can lead to reduced stress and anxiety that the relocation process brings and decrease the chance for experiencing cultural shock. More than that, it is a way of organizational support which has been found to facilitate the individuals' cross-cultural adjustment and work performance.

During the PA phase, it is important that the host organization offers team-building exercises and activities where the migrants are offered the opportunity to make new connections, involve in local activities and get familiar with the country to facilitate their adjustment. Moreover, the host organization is necessary to reward the hard work of the

individuals, show respect and appreciation and offer opportunities and tasks that inspire creativity and personal and professional development. Considering the Perceived Organizational Support theory, reward and show of respect and appreciation of the host organization leads to improved job performance and satisfaction and commitment (Eisenberg and Hutington 1986). As cross-cultural competence development is an ongoing process, the continuation of the CCT program in PA phase is detrimental to the facilitation of the migrants' adjustment.

To summarize, the CCT program presented above is designed not only to prepare the IMEs for a new cultural environment, on both practical and psychological bases, but also to support them after their arrival to the new culture and workplace. The PD phase is dedicated to informing individuals about practical aspects of the new culture, to developing intercultural competencies, and language skills and to providing practical assistance to the relocation process. The PA phase on the other hand caters for providing support to the IMEs after their arrival to the new country and aims at ensuring a smooth transition and adjustment to the new workplace. On a second level it aims at offering an initial support with network building. Being equipped with intercultural competence, essential knowledge about the new culture and language skills, in combination with being supported throughout the relocation process and the network building, IMEs' cultural adjustment can be facilitated to promote personal and professional development.

7. Limitations and further research

This section describes the limitations of this research paper as well as the areas where further research would be fruitful. The first three paragraphs refer to the limitations and then another paragraph follows suggesting areas for further research.

It is worth mentioning that this study has several limitations that could make way for further research. First, it is important to stress that the number of participants was restricted to thirty-six, which in turn restricted the results of the survey. Should the participants be more, more inclusive data might emerge as well as new unexplored categories and patterns may surface. Second, the questionnaire in the survey was created in a way to align with the time framework and limitation of the current research paper. The main concern is that the multiple-choice answers that were provided in most questions might pose an issue of bias towards the participants' answers. Even though an 'other' checkbox was always provided, to endorse participants add any new information, the existing examples in every question may have discouraged the participants from further reflecting into their experiences. Thus, in future research extensive interviews and open-ended questions would be an interesting way to explore the people's experiences and maybe identify new patterns.

Another limitation of the current research paper was the focus on gathering more generalizable data and not focusing much on individual factors that might affect the degree of difficulty to adjust to a new country. For instance, as mentioned earlier in section 3.2, the variable of gender was purposefully omitted as it had been found to be considerable in the process of individuals' adjustment. Other factors that could be further considered include the relationship of the motivation to migrate or immigrate with the imminent cultural adjustment of the individuals, or the extent to which personality and individual characteristics contribute to one's process of adjustment. As Fitzpatrick (2017:285) mentions, studies have shown that personal traits, such as openness, tolerance to stress and ambiguity, empathy, flexibility, conflict resolution skills or unrealistic expectations are positively associated with adjustment. However, the time frame and the scope of the current paper restricted the focus of the survey and the analysis of the emerged data.

As far as the model of an optimal cross-cultural training program is concerned (section 6.3), it was mentioned that it is designed according to findings of previous research and the results of the current survey. Thus, it is important to mention that the program includes phases

and parts that can be applied only when the temporal and financial resources are available and mainly when the host organization bears a multinational and multicultural character and environment. In other words, an ideal CCT program is suggested that can be most effective in an ideal scenario where the host organization can offer the time and financial resources necessary to realize it.

Thereafter, further research is necessary to further explore the ways that immigrants, migrants and expatriates' cultural adjustment can be facilitated to ensure professional, social and intercultural success for the individuals and the host organizations. In particular, it is important to explore the application of the model of the CCT program that is suggested and reflect on its effectivity and its different aspects. Of course, it is also necessary to apply the program in order to establish the time framework that is required for the program to be completed in the Pre-Departure phase, as well as how long it is deemed necessary to preserve the Post-Arrival phase of the program. After that, new information might come to light that could prove useful to explain the effectiveness of cross-cultural training and preparation and further establish its relationship with cross-cultural adjustment and competence. Further research could also focus on the extent that personality factors contribute to cross-cultural adjustment and the effectiveness of the CCT programs. This could in turn shed some light on aspects of intercultural education methods as well as on methods of training people who carry out the CCT programs.

Despite the limitations however, the current research paper has managed to extend on previous research and generate data that are confirmed by existing literature. The results have been used to suggest an optimal cross-cultural training program, the design of which aims at improving the effectiveness of such programs in general.

8. Concluding thoughts

Taking everything into account, this research paper has sought to augment the existing literature and previous research on cross-cultural training programs and their effectivity on immigrants, migrants and expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment. As previous research has shown, people who relocate to a foreign culture to be employed there, usually find it difficult to adjust to the new country and workplace. It has been found that several factors, such as cultural distance and differences, lack of language competence, separation from home network and difficulty building a new network, or finding accommodation to name a few, make the individuals' cultural adjustment challenging. As a result, individuals fail to adjust both to the country and its unfamiliar lifestyle and in turn to the new workplace, costing to the individuals a lot of emotional strain and the host organizations economic loss.

Cross-cultural training programs as a means of organizational support has proven to be an effective way to prepare the individuals before their departure and offer them appropriate training that will enable them to manage the imminent cross-cultural differences and challenges they may face. Many researchers have referred to the advantages of cross-cultural training programs, such as development of international manager mindset, better management of culture shock, greater job satisfaction as well as significant reduction of stress caused by the uncertainty an unfamiliar environment creates. However, as some cross-cultural training programs fail to take into consideration the numerous factors that affect one's cultural adjustment and are not applied through appropriate methods, they are deemed ineffective and make it critical to be further researched, developed and improved.

Therefore, the current paper focused on investigating migrants, immigrants and expatriates' personal experiences, in order to find the essential elements that should be included in cross-cultural training programs and facilitate their adjustment. A survey in the form of a questionnaire was created and distributed, and then completed by thirty-six participants who have been or currently are employed abroad. The survey focused on gathering information about the ways they prepared, struggles they faced and the factors that facilitated their adjustment. The results were confirmed by previous research and existing literature as they showed that the most common challenges individuals face when relocating abroad are language competence, separation from home network, climate and food differences, building a network, cultural misunderstandings, accommodation, cost of living, uncertain work duties, relocation

process and racism. As far as the facilitating factors are concerned, it was found that building a new network, learning the language, being supported by the host organization, developing cultural sensitivity, engaging in local activities and maintaining support network were factors that facilitated the individuals' cultural adjustment.

Thus, having in mind the findings of previous research, the data that emerged from the current survey along with the analysis of the data, an enhanced cross-cultural training program has been suggested. The design of the program takes into consideration all the different factors that inhibit and those that facilitate the individuals' cross-cultural adjustment and attempts to offer an inclusive training that will prepare the individuals from a variety of aspects and equip them with the appropriate competencies to deal with unfamiliar and intercultural situations. In practice the program includes two phases, the Pre-Departure and the Post-Arrival ones. In the PD phase it is important to introduce the individuals to the new culture, to develop intercultural and cross-cultural competence and knowledge and to provide practical assistance to their relocation process. As it is deemed necessary to preserve the training process after the individuals' arrival, in the PA phase, it necessary to be valued and appreciated by the host organization and their new coworkers. Applying this program with the right methods and learning frameworks, cross-cultural adjustment is facilitated, and the individuals develop essential skills that they can apply in a multicultural environment and deal with various situations.

However, as with every research, the current one does not come without some limitations. Namely, the number of participants could be expanded, or long reflective open-ended interview questions could yield more results and identify new patterns. Further, even though it was beyond the focus on the current research paper, other variables such as gender or motivation to integrate or migrate could be considered in future research as they might affect the individuals' adjustment. Such limitations pave the way for future research in the field of cross-cultural adjustment and cross-cultural training programs, as well as in the area of appropriately developing cross-cultural and intercultural competence and training specialists that can effectively carry out the training programs. To conclude, the increasing global market has made relocation and working abroad an essential part of professional careers and multinational companies' development. With relocation, the matters of cross-cultural adjustment and its consequences surface, making it necessary to spend time and effort in preparation before the individuals' departure and support their adjustment after their arrival, to

ensure successful relocation and job satisfaction. Cross-cultural training programs are a way to effectively facilitate one's adjustment provided that they are designed carefully and applied appropriately. As intercultural competence and cultural adjustment are constantly developing fields, more research is encouraged in the related fields for more insights and patterns to be identified in the future.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A First Part of Questionnaire

Appendix A includes the first two parts (Figures A1 and A2) of the questionnaire that was used in the survey to collect data.

Adjustment of immigrant employees in a culturally new environment.

My name is Chrysiida Psarri, and I am currently working on my MA thesis in Language and Intercultural Communication in the University of Gothenburg. My topic concerns the cultural adjustment of immigrant employees, as well as the factors that hinder or facilitate their working and living in a culturally new environment. Please fill the questionnaire and feel free to reflect on your personal experiences. It will take about ten minutes to complete!
Your identity will remain anonymous and only the information you choose to enter may be used, exclusively for the purpose of this research paper. Your participation is voluntary, and none of the questions are obligatory, so if you feel uncomfortable with answering any of the following questions you may skip them.

Thank you in advance for your time and contribution!

In case you have any questions or need clarifications please contact me at guspsach@student.gu.se.

 chrysiidapsarri@gmail.com (not shared) [Switch accounts](#) 

*Required

I agree that my answers will be used for the purpose of this paper. *

I agree.

1. What is your age?

Your answer _____

2. What is your country of origin?

Your answer _____

Figure A1- Questions 1-2

3. In which country (other than your own) do you currently work or have worked in the past? You can state more than one.

Your answer

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Figure A2- Question 3.

Appendix B

Second Part of Questionnaire

Appendix B includes the second part of the questionnaire, in particular questions 4 to 10, presented in Figures B1, B2 and B3.

Working in another country.

4. In what way did you prepare for the new culture before your departure? (You may choose more than one)

- Cross-cultural training
- Self-preparation
- Information from friends/ relatives/ partners
- Previous experience
- Other: _____

5. What were the biggest challenges you faced after you arrived in the new country and workplace? (You may choose more than one)

- Language
- Cultural misunderstandings
- Uncertainty about work duties/values/traditions
- Difficulty building network
- Housing
- Climate/ food
- Cost of living
- Relocation process
- Visa/ resident permits
- Family members adjustment
- Separation from family and friends
- Other: _____

Figure B1. Questions 4-5.

6. Did these challenges affect you psychologically or your motivation to work?

Your answer _____

7. What helped you adjust in the new environment after your arrival?

- Support by my workplace
- Friends/ coworkers
- Language courses
- Other: _____

8. Do you think it would be easier for you to adjust to the new country if your host organization provided cross-cultural training and relocation assistance before and during your arrival?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Other: _____

Figure B2. Questions 6-8

9. If yes, what would you consider the most important type(s) of support? (You may choose more than one)

- Language courses
- Accommodation
- Help building network
- Family members adjustment
- Intercultural education
- Other: _____

10. Do you think that if you were better prepared and adjusted in the new culture, you would have better motivation to work and live in the new country? If no, please explain.

Your answer _____

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Figure B3. Questions 9-10