



Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Su-Ann Tan

DR CULTURE SHIFT AND THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

What is it?

Cross-cultural adaptation is an overarching concept that integrates a variety of terms referring to the process of cross-cultural transition—such as acculturation, assimilation, coping, and adjustment. The concept is defined as an ongoing process in which individuals, after moving to a new or unfamiliar cultural milieu, build and sustain mutually beneficial and functional connections in the new environment. Central to the concept is the placement of adaptation at the intersection of the individual and the environment into which they are entering, a process which is fundamentally communicative.

The process of cross-cultural adaptation is understood in the context of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. Stress is seen as imperative to growth as individuals reorganise themselves in response to unexpected and culturally foreign situations. Researchers measure adaptation by using sociocultural adaptation scales to assess behavioural competence and psychological adaptation measures to evaluate emotional well-being in the new milieu.

Who uses the concept?

Cross-cultural adaptation is widely studied across disciplines such as intercultural communication, cross-cultural psychology, international business and management, sociology, humanitarian and migration studies, international education, and global health, all of which have contributed important perspectives on how individuals adjust to new cultural environments.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Cross-cultural adaptation is fundamentally communicative, with dialogue between the individual in transition and the receiving community contributing to the adaptation process. This reciprocal dynamic creates opportunities for mutual learning, exchange of cultural knowledge and a shift in perspectives.

What work remains?

Studies tracking individuals from pre-arrival to long-term adaptation; comparative studies across cultural, institutional, and national contexts; and explorations of the role of digital media, transnational networks, and policy on adaptation; and studies into the reciprocal nature of adaptation would enrich understanding of how multicultural identities are negotiated and the mutual influence of individuals and receiving communities.

Resources

- Gaitán-Aguilar, L., Hofhuis, J., Bierwiazzonek, K., & Carmona, C. (2022). [Social media use, social identification and cross-cultural adaptation of international students: A longitudinal examination](#). *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1013375.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: an integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Sage.