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Abstract

This paper provides a theoretical basis for the empirical link between traits and intercultural success indicators relying on the A (Affect) B (Behavior) C (Cognition)-model of culture shock. With respect to affect, we argue that intercultural traits can be differentiated according to whether they predispose individuals to be (in-)sensitive to either threat or challenge. Whereas stress-related traits (emotional stability, flexibility) are linked to a lower tendency to perceive an intercultural situation as threatening, social-perceptual traits (social initiative, open-mindedness) may predispose individuals to perceive its challenging aspects and respond with positive affect. As a behavioral consequence, stress-buffering traits may protect against culture shock, whereas social-perceptual traits may facilitate cultural learning. Finally, the ABC-model defines cognitions in terms of associated cultural identity patterns. Whereas stress-related traits may help individuals refrain from sticking to one's own culture, social-perceptual traits reinforce identification with new culture. Implications for training and development are discussed.

Keywords

cultural psychology, personality, acculturation

Introduction

The world in general becomes more globally interconnected, and nations across the world become increasingly multicultural. Therefore, whether it is at work, at school, or in their private lives, individuals must be increasingly able to effectively deal with cultural differences. Personality seems to be an important predictor of an individual's success of dealing with intercultural situations (e.g., Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005; Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006). For example, moving from Amsterdam to Kabul as an expatriate may for some of us look like a paralyzing experience, evoking strong feelings of threat and loneliness; for others, it may lead to excitement, and new and interesting networks. Personality may not only be related to the perception of intercultural situations as threatening or not, but also express itself in

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whether individuals are capable of constructive behavioral reactions to such situations (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007).

In our own work, we distinguished between five personality traits of relevance to success in an intercultural context: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001). Empirical evidence reveals that the five intercultural traits have explanatory value above and beyond the Big Five in predicting outcomes such as successful adjustment of employees on the diverse work floor (e.g., Van der Zee, Atsma, & Brodbeck, 2004); migrants (Bakker, Van der Zee, & Van Oudenhoven, 2006), expatriates (Van Oudenhoven, Mol, & Van der Zee, 2003), and international students (Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). Although the empirical support for the relevance of personality to intercultural success is growing, little is known about the underlying mechanisms that are responsible for such effects. In this paper, we provide a theoretical basis for these findings by linking our intercultural personality approach to the A (Affect) B (Behavior) C (Cognition)-model of culture shock (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Dealing With Intercultural Situations

The role of personality in intercultural effectiveness is increasingly acknowledged (for an overview, see Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, in press). Several studies have, for example, documented the relevance of the Five-Factor model to the success of expatriates (Caligiuri, 2000; Huanget al., 2005; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999; Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004). The Five-Factor Model (FFM; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993) is an influential general model of personality—I extraversion, II agreeableness, III conscientiousness, IV neuroticism, and V intellect/autonomy—also referred to as openness to experience (Costa & McCrae, 1992). For example, Caligiuri (2000) reports relationships between four of the Big Five traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability) and expatriation outcomes such as termination of the assignment and supervisor-rated performance. In a similar vein, findings by Huang et al. (2005) suggest that American expatriates in Taiwan who scored highly on extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience adjusted better to the new cultural context as compared with low scorers. Based on a longitudinal study among expatriates in Hong Kong and two samples of Korean and Japanese expatriates sent around the world, Shaffer and colleagues (1999) reported that extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness to experience were related to expatriate effectiveness.

An important limitation of the FFM in the context of intercultural success is that the five dimensions are not specifically attuned to behavioral tendencies that are relevant in intercultural situations. In our own work, we departed from the assumption that traits that are specifically linked to critical behaviors in an intercultural context are better able to predict outcomes in such situations as compared with more general traits. On the basis of an extensive literature review, we derived five dimensions that are directly linked to success in an intercultural context: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001). The first trait is *cultural empathy* referring to empathizing with the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals from a different culture. Individuals high on this dimension easily understand the rules of cultures that are unknown to them. The second trait is *open-mindedness*, reflecting an open and unprejudiced attitude toward cultural differences. When confronted with different behavior or value systems, individuals high on open-mindedness are able to postpone their judgment. Third, *social initiative* refers to a tendency to actively approach social situations. In an intercultural context, high scorers on this trait tend to demonstrate initiative, or start an interaction rather than wait and watch. Fourth, *emotional stability* reflects an ability to stay calm under novel and stressful conditions. High scorers on this trait will in most situations not scare away in intercultural situations that are often characterized by high

uncertainty and lack of control. Finally, in intercultural situations, people need to be able to switch easily from one strategy to another because familiar ways of handling things may no longer work. Moreover, they should not be afraid of new and unknown situations but instead feel attracted to them, seeing them as a challenge rather than a threat. *Flexibility* is therefore added as the fifth dimension of multicultural effectiveness. It refers to interpreting novel situations as a positive challenge and adapting to these situations accordingly. Note that except for flexibility, the five dimensions are conceptually close to the Big Five; emotional stability is even literally represented in both instruments. The first empirical study on the predictive value of the five intercultural traits among students revealed that, although together the five dimensions are able to predict variance in criteria related to intercultural success above and beyond the Big Five, the traits of emotional stability and social initiative were not able to predict additional variance above the five general traits, whereas the remaining traits did explain unique variance (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). A study among employees in which we tried to predict scores on each intercultural trait from the Big Five revealed that cultural empathy and open-mindedness were least predicted by the Big Five (with 14% and 17% explained variance, respectively), whereas emotional stability and flexibility were best predicted by the five general traits (with 27%, 35%, and 38% explained variance for social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility, respectively; Van der Zee, Zaal, & Piekstra, 2003). Apparently, cultural empathy and open-mindedness are more culture-specific, as compared with the other traits.

What do we know about the predictiveness of these traits against indicators of intercultural success? Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that the five intercultural dimensions predict intercultural effectiveness among employees (Brinkmann & van der Zee, 1999; Van der Zee et al., 2003), intercultural teams (Van der Zee, Atsma, et al., 2004; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, et al., 2004), migrants (Hofstra, 2009; Bakker et al., 2006), expatriates, and their families (Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; Peltokorpi, 2008; Van der Zee, Ali, & Haaksma, 2007; Van Erp, Van der Zee, Giebels, & Van Duijn, 2011; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2003) and international students (Leong, 2007; Mol, Van Oudenhoven, & Van der Zee, 2001; Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). As we mentioned, in predicting intercultural success, the five dimensions have demonstrated incremental validity over broad personality measures such as the Big Five (Leone, Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, Perugini, & Ercolani, 2005; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001; Van der Zee et al., 2003). The predictive value of the five traits has been established for three criteria that are theoretically linked to intercultural success: professional performance, personal adjustment, and social integration (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). For example, a study among expatriates in Japan showed relationships of emotional stability and cultural empathy with psychological adjustment, intercultural interactions, and professional effectiveness (Peltokorpi, 2008). A recent meta-analytic study by Wilson, Ward, and Fischer (2013) reveals that the strength of relationships between cultural empathy and scores on the Sociocultural Adjustment Scale (SCAS; Searle & Ward, 1990) clearly exceeds relationships with the Big Five ($r = .49$). The SCAS measures skills required to manage everyday situations and aspects of a new culture (Searle & Ward, 1990). In a similar vein, Ali et al. (2003), found open-mindedness and emotional stability to be important predictors of intercultural interactions, satisfaction with life and socio-cultural adjustment among Dutch expatriates based in several different countries. Emotional stability seems also predictive of quality of life and the socio-cultural adjustment of expatriate children (Van der Zee et al., 2007). Social initiative has been linked to indicators of social integration and psychological well-being of sojourners. Van Oudenhoven et al. (2003), for example, found that social initiative was a strong predictor of psychological well-being among Western expatriates in Taiwan. Likewise, from a study among undergraduate students who attended an international exchange program, Leong (2007) reports relationships of social initiative with social-cultural and psychological adjustment. Interestingly, a recent work on expatriate couples by Van Erp et al. (2011) suggests that the absence of a multicultural trait in one partner

can be compensated for by a high level of the same trait in the other partner. More specifically, their results showed that an expatriate with a low score on social initiative or open-mindedness could still maintain a high level of adjustment, provided their partner was high on these traits. In total, there is substantial evidence that intercultural traits are predictive of success in an intercultural context. Moreover, personality as a coping resource may be exchangeable among individuals within families.

Underlying Theoretical Mechanisms

Although there is quite a literature linking general and more specific traits to indicators of intercultural effectiveness, only a few studies have focused on the underlying processes that are responsible for the positive relationship between traits and indicators of intercultural success. In the present paper, we aim to provide a theoretical framework for the relationship between personality and intercultural success by linking our intercultural personality approach to the ABC-model of culture shock by Ward and colleagues (Ward et al., 2001). This model is based on the assumption that intercultural contact involves affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects, and that adjustments and changes as a result of culture shock concern all of these three aspects. Adjustment on each of the three elements in the model, that is, Affect (A), Behavior (B), and Cognition (C) are described in terms of stress and coping, culture learning, and social identification, respectively.

Affect

With respect to affective responses to intercultural situations, Ward et al. (2001) largely draw on the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991). Cognitive appraisal theory assumes that emotional responses to potentially stressful situations depend on cognitive appraisals of these situations as either a threat or a challenge (Lazarus, 1991). Intercultural situations include both threatening features (loss of control, inconveniences, uncertainty, identity threat) and challenging aspects (exotism, adventure, interesting encounters). We propose that intercultural traits can be differentiated according to whether they predispose individuals to be particularly (in-)sensitive to either threat or challenge. The neurological basis for this idea is provided by Gray's (1972) theory of brain functions and behavior. This theory postulates two dimensions of personality, referred to as *anxiety* (or *anxiety proneness*) and *impulsivity*. These two qualities of personality represent individual differences in the sensitivity of two neurological systems in their responses to relevant environmental cues. Consistent with this idea, we distinguish between *stress-buffering traits* that are linked to a lower tendency to perceive intercultural situations as *threatening* and to respond with less negative affect to cultural differences, from social-perceptual traits that are associated with a tendency to perceive intercultural situations as *challenging*.

Stress-buffering traits seem to have their neurological basis in the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS) in the brain. The BIS is described in Gray's (1972) theory of brain functions and behavior as an aversive motivational system. It comprises the septohippocampal system, its monoaminergic afferents from the brainstem, and its neocortical projection in the frontal lobe. Gray has argued that this physiological mechanism controls the experience of anxiety in response to anxiety-relevant cues. The BIS, according to Gray, is sensitive to signals of punishment, non-reward, and novelty. It inhibits behavior that may lead to negative or painful outcomes. Gray has also held that BIS functioning is responsible for the experience of negative feelings such as fear, anxiety, frustration, and sadness in response to these cues. In terms of individual differences in personality, greater BIS sensitivity should be reflected in greater proneness to anxiety, provided the person is exposed to proper situational cues. Individuals with a high reactivity of the BIS will be highly responsive to cues that indicate unsafeness. Under natural conditions, the BIS is

activated when we observe that our actions will be ineffective. The BIS results in an evolutionary history in which this system made itself useful by operating intermittently, temporarily preventing any useless action that could only have made matters worse. In human societies based on competition, individuals may activate their BIS, to avoid reprisals (e.g., Gray, 1991). In an intercultural context this may lead to a tendency to avoid rather than to approach situations characterized by strangeness. Individual differences in reactivity of the BIS may lead to a situation in which the inhibition of behavior is no longer merely an adaptive interval between approach and avoidance behaviors, but instead becomes a chronic source of anxiety. This sense of uneasiness may not only lead to incompetent behaviors, but may gradually also undermine an individual's health, by causing psychosomatic illnesses, stomach ulcers, arterial hypertension, and even cancer or impaired immune function. The intercultural traits of emotional stability and flexibility can be regarded as stress-buffering traits, since these traits respectively refer to the ability to deal with uncertainty and lack of control. In earlier empirical work, support was obtained for a higher-order factor underlying the five intercultural traits, encompassing items from both dimensions that indeed could be interpreted in terms of the ability to deal with uncertainty and change (Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, & De Grijns, 2004).

By contrast, the physiological mechanism that controls appetitive motivation is called the *behavioral activation system* (BAS; Fowles, 1980). The neural basis of the BAS is less-clearly specified than that of the BIS, though catecholaminergic, especially dopaminergic, pathways are believed to play a central role (cf. Stellar & Stellar, 1985). This system is said to be sensitive to signals of reward. Activity in this system causes the person to begin (or to increase) movement toward goals. Individuals with a strong reactivity of the BAS are sensitive to cues that indicate rewards or challenge (Gray, 1991). Gray (1972) has also held that the BAS is responsible for the experience of positive feelings such as hope, elation, and happiness. In terms of individual differences in personality, greater BAS sensitivity should be reflected in greater proneness to engage in goal-directed efforts and to experience positive feelings when the person is exposed to cues of impending reward (see Carver & White, 1994). Applied to our intercultural traits, the social-perceptual traits of cultural empathy, open-mindedness, and social initiative may contribute to intercultural success because individuals high on these traits perceive intercultural situations as *challenging* and subsequently respond with more positive affect to such situations (Hofhuis, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2012; Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, et al., 2004). Whereas cultural empathy and open-mindedness are traits that are primarily associated with differential (understanding and open) perceptions of intercultural situations, social initiative is a trait that is first and utmost linked to relation building. In empirical studies, the scales of cultural empathy and open-mindedness have consistently shown high intercorrelations (e.g., Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001), and have sometimes also been combined into one higher-order factor of Openness (e.g., Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, et al., 2004). Both scales also reveal relatively high correlations with the trait of social initiative (or extraversion).

A number of empirical studies support the assumption that the facilitating role of the five traits in intercultural situations may differ in nature with stress-buffering traits protecting against their threatening features, and social-perceptual traits primarily facilitating exploration of their social and cognitive opportunities. Several empirical studies support this assumption (Hofhuis et al., 2012; Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, et al., 2004). For example, in the first experimental study, students were confronted with descriptions of intercultural situations that varied in potential stressfulness (low vs. high; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, et al., 2004). In addition, to create a situation of internal threat, half of the respondents were threatened by means of a mortality salience manipulation. This is a manipulation advocated by researchers in the tradition of terror management theory (TMT). TMT assumes that the importance of cultural values increases when an individual's basic sense of safety is threatened. Indeed,

there is quite some evidence that existential threat increases identification with one's own cultural norms and decreases tolerance toward deviant norms (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989, Study 1; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1990). Within the paradigm of TMT, threat is usually induced by making people conscious of their finiteness or mortality. More specifically, respondents are asked to write down a few sentences about what they think will happen to them when they die and the emotions that the thought of death arouse in them. Respondents in the control condition usually receive a comparable instruction with respect to a neutral topic (watching televisions; e.g., Greenberg et al., 1993; Lieberman, 1999).

Our study revealed a number of interesting results with respect to personality influences on appraisals and affective responses to the intercultural situations in the presence and the absence of threat. First, the data showed that low scorers on a factor that combined the dimensions of emotional stability and flexibility (Adaptation) were more inclined to perceive the uncertain and uncontrollable intercultural situation as threatening in comparison with high scorers. Consistently low scorers on the Adaptation factor also experienced more negative affect in response to the stressful intercultural situation compared with high scorers. These findings were not affected by the presence or absence of threat. Secondly, in line with what we had predicted, high scorers on a factor that combined cultural empathy and open-mindedness (Openness) more strongly tended to perceive the uncertain and uncontrollable intercultural situation as challenging, and responded with more positive affect compared with low scorers. It must be noted that high scorers on Openness were also less inclined to perceive the intercultural situation as threatening, which may be a consequence of focusing on its challenging nature. Threat did not moderate personality influences on appraisal, but it did have a moderating effect on the way openness was related to affect. The positive impact of openness on affective responses to intercultural situations disappeared in the presence of threat.

A weakness of the first study was that the experiment did not include a monocultural situation: Both situations that respondents had to respond to were intercultural in nature. Therefore, we performed a second experimental study, in which students responded to a videotaped scene from a meeting of a team that was either culturally homogeneous or culturally diverse. Again, we induced threat among half of the respondents by means of a mortality salience manipulation. The data provided further support for our theoretical assumptions. For individuals high on emotional stability (stress-buffering trait), personality contributed to positive affective responses to a diverse team, but only in the *presence* of threat. For individuals high on social initiative (social-perceptual trait), personality contributed to positive affective responses to a diverse team, but only in the absence of threat.

These studies provide first evidence for the threat-reducing nature of stress-related traits in intercultural situations. Moreover, they suggest that the social-perceptual traits do not have this protective value against threat, but are rather linked to a focus on opportunities in intercultural situations. An important limitation of both studies was that student samples were used and that we relied on scenarios rather than actual situations. In a recent study in the context of cultural diversity at the work place, we linked personality to employees' appraisals of different challenges and threats associated with cultural diversity in their work environment (Hofhuis et al., 2012). Challenges were for example enhanced creativity and opportunities for learning or a more inspiring social environment. Examples of threats were problematic interactions with members of different cultural groups, profitability loss, and changing norms and values. The data revealed that the stress-buffering trait of emotional stability was associated with a lower tendency to perceive threats associated with intercultural situations but appeared unrelated to perceived challenges. By contrast, cultural empathy was associated with a higher tendency to perceive challenges associated with intercultural situations. Much weaker but still significant (negative) correlations were found between cultural empathy and perceived threats. As we argued for the Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, et al. (2004) study, individuals who generally tend to perceive challenges may,

unless they are seriously threatened, also be less inclined to perceive threats. This may be a consequence of their focus on positive rather than negative features of intercultural situations. Reversely, not being fearful does not necessarily imply perceiving challenges. This may explain why for emotional stability lower appraisals of threat are not accompanied by higher appraisals of challenge.

To summarize, stress-buffering and social-perceptual dimensions of personality may both be associated with positive affective responses to intercultural situations, but for different reasons. Whereas individuals high in stress-buffering traits are less inclined to perceive threat, individuals high on social-cognitive dimensions are more inclined to perceive challenge in intercultural situations. In their ABC-model, Ward et al. (2001) link cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991) to the affective component in their model but not to the cognitive component. We think the role of cognitive appraisals of intercultural situations is at least equally important in understanding individual differences in *cognitive* responses.

Behavior

The behavioral component in the ABC-model of culture shock is associated with cultural learning by Ward et al. (2001; see also Wilson et al., 2013). Their core idea is that “the rules, conventions and assumptions that regulate interpersonal interactions, including both verbal and non-verbal communication, vary across cultures” (Ward et al., p. 271). It is therefore in their view important to have the necessary social skills to bridge cultural differences in mutual interactions. Ward et al. not only assume that the ability to deal with intercultural situations will grow with experience, but they also acknowledge that personality may facilitate the amount of growth that actually takes place. Translated to the intercultural traits in our model, particularly social-perceptual traits may be associated with the ability to bridge cultural differences. Research among internationally oriented individuals has shown that the number of languages known by participants was correlated with cultural empathy and open-mindedness (De Waele & Van Oudenhoven, 2010; Korzelius, Van Hooft, Planken, & Hendrix, 2011). An additional interesting perspective can be found in work on transformational coping (Aldwin, 1994; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Most studies on transformational coping have focused on children who grow up under vulnerable circumstances, studying conditions under which they develop further vulnerability or develop specific competencies as a result of the experience. On the basis of clinical observations, Wolin and Wolin (1993) identified six categories of resilience that may develop in children growing up under vulnerable circumstances, which may also apply in an intercultural context:

1. *Insight*: understanding that the fact that one’s behavior is leading to negative reactions from others is not one’s fault but a result of different perspectives on what is normal;
2. *Independence*: separating oneself from one’s own cultural group may develop an ability to manage things on one’s own;
3. *Relationships*: cultivating positive relations with others;
4. *Initiative*: developing strategies to manage stressful situations (trial and error, perseverance, “chunking of tasks” into manageable bits);
5. *Creativity*: finding creative solutions to problems and actively trying to transform negative things into positive ones; and
6. *Humor*: using humor to mitigate negative situations and transform them.¹

The development of these dimensions of resilience or competencies over the course of intercultural experience may in part be dependent upon personality. First, the trade-off between vulnerability and resilience may be a function of stress-buffering traits. Among low scorers on stress-related traits, high levels of culture shock may prohibit learning. Among high scorers the

stress-related traits facilitate adaptation to the new and unknown situation, opening the way for actual learning. The social-perceptual traits may in turn facilitate growth in resilience, for example, by fostering independence or creativity. Note that theories on intercultural adjustment assume that phases of culture shock (characterized by vulnerability) and cultural learning (characterized by resilience) follow each other over time. This implies that the importance of traits for adjustment outcomes may also change over time. Indeed, in a study among international students, emotional stability proved to be the most important predictor for international business students' success of adaptation at the start of their academic career. However, after 6 months, social initiative and cultural empathy became more important predictors of their successful adaptation (Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). Future studies may apply the work by Wolin and Wolin (1993) to an intercultural context to shed further light on resilience components and to link specific intercultural traits to specific components of learning or resilience.

Cognitions

The final component of the ABC-model concerns cognitions. Ward et al. (2001) discuss cognitions primarily in relation to social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and not to cognitive appraisals. Cultural transitions pose a challenge to one's cultural identity. Individuals may differ in the extent to which they are capable of identifying with a foreign culture or to switch between their original and the host culture identities. With respect to the ability to switch between identities, Miller, Brewer, and Arbuttle (2009) introduced the construct of identity complexity. Individuals with complex identities define themselves in terms of multiple group memberships (e.g., being Chinese, a liberal, and a dentist) rather than in terms of one dominant identity (e.g., primarily being Chinese). Individuals with complex identities are better able to connect with others regardless of background, and to be tolerant toward different cultures. The five intercultural traits may help in the development of more complex identities in which elements of the old and the new culture are integrated (e.g., Miller et al, 2009). As an expression of a complex identity, findings by Benet-Martinez and colleagues suggest the relevance of *biculturalism* for indicators of intercultural competence such as developing cross-group social networks, well-being, and achievements (Benet-Martinez, 2012). Biculturals are individuals whose self-label reflects their cultural dualism and who are able to flexibly move between cultural orientations (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). Research has supported the role of traits like neuroticism and openness to experience as antecedent of biculturalism (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2007). In this regard, individuals high on neuroticism are more inclined to perceive a clash between their native and host cultures, and individuals low in openness tend to perceive a larger distance between native and host cultures, compared with high scorers (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2007).

In a related vein, the construct of identity conflict also seems relevant (Baumeister, Shapiro, & Tice, 1985; Leong & Ward, 2000). In this regard, Ward, Stuart and Kus (2011) introduced the construct of "ethno-cultural conflict," referring to perceptions and cognitions reflecting incompatibility of ethnic and cultural dimensions of self and a diminished sense of identity clarity and coherence. Results from an empirical study that these authors performed among 975 immigrants suggest that high ethno-cultural conflict is associated with low sociocultural adjustment. Moreover, the experience of ethno-cultural conflict seems, as holds for biculturalism, to be at least partly grounded in personality, as is displayed in a small but meaningful negative relationship with Harmony, a subscale of the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (CPAI; Cheung, Cheung, Leung, Ward, & Leong, 2003).

The stress-buffering traits may particularly help individuals to refrain from sticking too much to their own culture by protecting individuals against identity threat. Combining identities can be stressful as the tension between norms linked to each identity may give rise to role conflict

(Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1994). Individuals who not only seek contacts with the new culture but also clearly define and present themselves as members of their cultural background probably encounter more diversity-related stress (Van Oudenhoven & Eisses, 1998). Emotionally stable individuals seem better equipped to deal with this stress. The social-perceptual traits primarily seem to reinforce identification with the new culture (Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007; Bakker et al., 2006), which may foster emergence of a complex identity in the absence of stress. Empirical evidence to support this claim is scarce. An exception is, for example, a study by Swagler and La Rae (2005) showing that neuroticism is negatively related to an orientation toward the new culture ("mainstream acculturation"), whereas extraversion predicts an orientation toward the new and to the heritage culture ("heritage acculturation"). In a work context, Luijters, Van der Zee, and Otten (2006) confronted culturally different employees with a description of a fellow employee from a minority group who was either assimilating or integrating. Their data suggest that respondents who are low in emotional stability prefer assimilation over integration. Although these findings are by no means unequivocal, they do support the idea that stress-buffering and social-perceptual traits may each play a unique role in the development of complex identities. Future studies are needed to shed further light on this relationship.

Conclusion

An impressive number of studies have shown meaningful relationships between personality and intercultural adjustment outcomes. Many of them have used the Big Five as predictors; others have examined the predictive value of inventories that focus on traits that are more tailored to intercultural situations, such as the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire. Although the evidence for the link between personality and intercultural success is growing, a clear theoretical basis of the underlying mechanisms is lacking. A promising theoretical model is offered in the Affect, Behavior, and Cognition model by Ward et al. (2001) in which several forms of adjustment to culture shock are explained in terms of stress and coping, culture learning, and social identities, respectively. Another theoretically relevant distinction refers to stress-buffering (emotional stability and flexibility) and social-perceptual (open-mindedness, cultural empathy, and social initiative) intercultural traits. This distinction can also be better explained by the ABC-model: (1) Stress-buffering traits reduce threatening experiences as a consequence of intercultural encounters thus reducing negative affect, whereas social-perceptual traits make individuals perceive intercultural situations as challenging and consequently as leading to positive affect. (2) Stress-buffering traits may facilitate adaptation to the new intercultural situation by reducing anxiety of the new behavior, while the social-perceptual traits will help the individual to approach the new situation with creativity and interest. (3) The complex cognitive task of managing different cultural identities will be easier if the individual's stress-buffering traits help to cope with a possible identity threat. The social-perceptual traits will enable the individual to see connections between different identities and to further adopt a complex identity without identity threat.

Insight into the relationship between personality and intercultural competence is important because it provides opportunities for assessment, training, and development. Now that a growing number of studies have demonstrated the role of personality as a predictor of intercultural competence, it is time to focus on intercultural training programs that focus on enhancing the relevant intercultural traits. Some preliminary research on intercultural training scenarios based on the three social-perceptual traits has been done (Herfst, Van Oudenhoven, & Timmerman, 2008). The social-perceptual traits are obvious candidates for training purposes. Cultural empathy implies taking the perspective of the culturally different, open-mindedness implies postponing one's judgment, and social initiative encompasses social behavioral acts such as asking questions, starting a conversation, or invitations to common activities. Intercultural trainers will not find it difficult to give examples of relevant intercultural behavior referring to cultural empathy,

open-mindedness, and social initiative. These traits are much easier to translate into training goals than to teach individuals to become emotionally stable or to be more flexible.

Most studies on intercultural training have been developed for expatriates. Further studies must show to what extent and how intercultural traits can be trained in other important target groups, notably international students and immigrants, and— increasingly important—to host nationals who currently have to deal with individuals from various cultural backgrounds in their daily life. Knowledge of intercultural traits may also be applied in second language teaching. In view of the importance of open-mindedness, and of cultural empathy to a lesser degree, these traits may be trained when starting or in combination with a formal language teaching program.

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Note

1. Wolin and Wolin (1993) mention morality as a final dimension, but we think that this dimension does not apply to transformations to another culture.

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