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## Styles for Coping with Culture Shock in Global Companies: Methodological Aspects of Intercultural Research

This article describes selected aspects of planning intercultural research from an interdisciplinary perspective. The intention of the authors is to describe questions linked with the mutual penetration of theoretical planes from the sociological and anthropological sciences as well as various fields of psychology. Hence, the need for a specific approach to planning research and research methodology for these types of problems. The authors make reference to scientific tradition linked with intercultural comparisons as well as methodological problems making their appearance in research projects so defined. The practical section of the article presents research financed through funding of the Committee for Scientific Research (KBN) over the years 2004–2005.

### Research Problems as Questions from the "Border Areas" of Scientific Fields

One of the more serious problems facing authors of research projects rooted in several diverse fields of science is the transfer of descriptions, theoretical approaches, and nomenclature from one field to another by "translating" the methodology of one science to that used by researchers from the other field. Thus, the comparison and detailing of definitions of concepts used as well as the finding of their appropriate operationalization become prime problems [Łuźniak, Witkowski, 2006]. In examining the psychological dimension of questions of acculturation, it is primarily necessary to make reference to anthropological concepts relating to changes in the functioning of groups, where one is subject to the influence of the other [Redfield, Linton, Herskovits, 1936]. These concepts are an attempt at capturing and understanding intercultural relations in a dimensions ranging from conflict and stress-generating experiences for the group and individuals making contact with each other all the way to relations defined as mutual adjustment and adaptation.

A successive research tradition is a stream of study tied with ethnic relations rooted in sociology and political science. Researchers representing this approach concentrate on efforts to understand the mechanisms governing perception, valuation, and the behavior of members of various groups in mutual contacts, both within the group and among diverse ethnic groups [Łuźniak, Witkowski, 2006].

Categories of descriptions of methods for monitoring the process of becoming a full-fledged member of a new culture and entering it deeply, real contact—acculturation—stem, in part, from the terminology of cognitive and social psychology (more on this topic in a later part of the article) and partially make up component parts of anthropological and sociological concepts, in line with the interdisciplinary nature of the project. Psychological methodology makes possible a broad examination of the topic, capturing it from a point of view other than anthropology, and looking at interactions among the personality and situational factors facing a worker in a multicultural organization. However, difficulties in the application of the methods of one discipline in the studies of another, often rather distant, are a consequence of such an approach to the topic. New problems of adapting tools, reminiscent of questions of cultural adaptation, also make their appearance (how much is common and how much differs among disciplines) [Łuźniak, Witkowski, 2006].

### Research Questions as a Consequence of the Interdisciplinary Nature of the Project

The objective of this research project was an examination of selected principles governing the culture shock syndrome. The presented study applies to the behavior of members of an intercultural team experiencing *cultural surrounding change situations* during work in global companies. In theories involving the psychology of intercultural and management differences, several phenomena accompanying the need to adapt to diametrical changes of surroundings are termed *culture shock*, also described in literature under the concept of *acculturative stress* [Berry, 1999]. The presented research tries to classify styles of coping with acculturative stress displayed by managers—members of multicultural teams [Łuźniak, 2003].

Research questions put during the building of the project were:

1. What shape do styles of breaking down culture shock, as preferred by members of organizations working subject to multicultural conditions, take on? What value of the variable X, as captured by the research scheme, coexists with the given style of breaking down culture shock (the Y variable)?
2. Is there a difference relating to social competencies linked with ease of adapting and maintaining a sense of happiness in new cultural surroundings (dimension: ease of

adaptation) and differences in level of knowledge relating to the possibility of foreseeing difficulties in functioning in an alien culture (dimension: intercultural insight) in connection with individual styles of breaking down cultural shock?

3. Are there individual differences in the sense of adaptation costs in breaking down cultural shock (the  $X_1$  variable) between the examined persons as seen in specific adaptation styles (the Y variable)?
4. Are there differences relating to sensing adaptive stress in breaking down culture shock (the  $X_2$  variable) in the examined people demonstrating specific adaptive styles (the Y variable)?
5. Is there a defined correlation of the X and Y variables making it possible to acknowledge one of the styles of coping with culture shock as most favorable, simultaneously encumbered by the lowest costs and level of stress?

### Difficulties in Cultural Adaptation of Research Methods

The fundamental problem facing the researcher undertaking cultural adaptation of a given research method is the cultural assumptions with respect to which the method was created as well as the degree to which such cultural conditions should be taken into account in its application. Usually, it is demonstrated that psychological questionnaires and tests should be applied and interpreted with great care outside the cultural context where they were created. Thus, it is essential to take into account at least seven contexts determining the usefulness of a tool created in a given culture for studying a different culture: theory context, objective context, cultural experience context, social awareness context, psychometric context, use context, and tool user qualification context [Brzeziński, 1990].

Each and every tool is based on a defined theoretical concept. It is the value of that concept that determines the value of the tool tied to it. What is significant is for the theoretical concept to correspond as accurately as possible with the examined reality. At this point the phenomenon of the popularity of the Hofstede cultural dimension concept [2000] should be mentioned. This Dutch researcher conducted very wide-ranging studies (117,000 questionnaires in sixty-eight countries among thirty-eight professional groups using twenty languages) that resulted in the identifying of five universal cultural dimensions: distance with respect to authority, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, evading uncertainty, and long-term orientation. This concept is embraced rather uncritically by management theoreticians, including management psychologists. A total of 42% of the works referenced in Hofstede's index of citations are from the realm of management and 32% from psychology, while only 0.3% are anthropological works and 2.5% are on sociology. What is interesting is the lack of acceptance of this con-

cept by representatives of disciplines in which the category of *culture* is a central one [compare with Paluchowski, 2004]. The favoring of the discussed concept by management psychologists is all the more incomprehensible as psychologists have developed their own theoretical solutions in studies on cultural phenomena. Categories of cultural phenomena descriptions include the view on principles, view on individual and group relations, preferred and acceptable behavior styles, ways of perceiving the world, designating social status, and view of natural surroundings and time [Kluckhohn, Stodtbeck, as in Paluchowski, 2004; Schwartz, Bilsky, 1990].

The context of cultural experience of the examined person should be mentioned in considering questions of cultural validation of methods. Persons being investigated should have at their disposal similar experiences in accordance with the culture in which the applied research tool was developed. Cultural experience is made up of educational, religious, and even historical factors. The same is true of the context of social awareness, which defines attitudes displayed by the examined persons using defined methods (stereotypes, prejudice, fear, enthusiasm). Also important is the context of use, which means applying the tool in line with the recommendations of the author of the original version. The context of the qualifications of the tool user is outside any discussion. Only a competent researcher has an awareness of the problems of cultural validation of tools and conditions for their later application.

### The Psychological View of the Research Questions

The changing level of acculturative stress and a differently sensed culture shock is the result of a deep acculturative experience as well as the number of factors perceived as stress-generating. It should also be noted that according to theoreticians, the culture shock syndrome only appears as a result of the multiplying of individually defined numbers of stress-generating factors for specific individuals, which means that it is not a syndrome characteristic of everyone, if only tourist-related contact with an alien culture [Berry, 1996].

The problem of stress—always present in contemporary psychology—encompasses a broad range of variants and studies. However, literature on these studies calls attention to the mutual theoretical and methodological ties of research into stress, crisis, critical life events, methods of coping, and the state of health as well as proper functioning of the psychologically adapted individual [Łyżniak, Witkowski, 2006].

The psychological view of stress has evolved from concentration on psychological stress examined one way or another to a focus on man in a stressful situation, the activities undertaken, and their results. Today, man's activity in difficult situations is most often described using the interactive model: person  $\times$  situation. The actions of the object

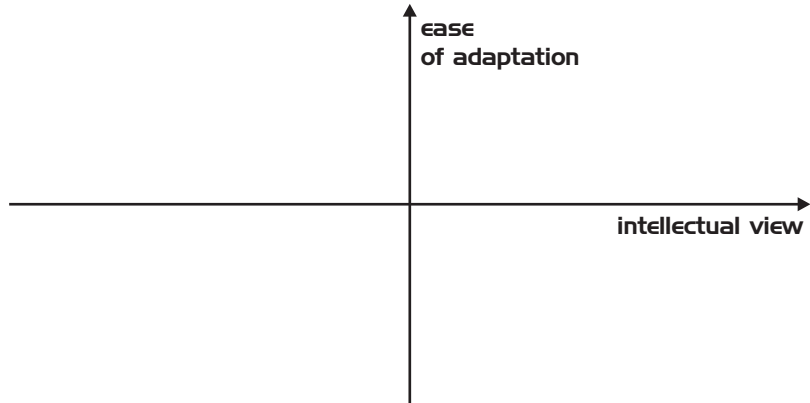
are treated as a result of individual and situational factors as well as their mutual interaction [Heszen–Niejodek, Ratajczak, 2000]. The transactional stress model of Lazarus and Folkman [1984] serves as a starting point and inspiration for the contemporary stress model [compare with Terelak, 1999]. However, since coping with stress in an interactive view is “a constantly changing cognitive and behavioral effort aimed at grasping internal and external requirements assessed as exceeding the resources of the individual” [Lazarus, Folkman, 1984], a question emerges on how to subject a process describing a concept, in which all variables change continuously as does the interaction among them, to empirical verification. This question was solved by differentiating between the “style,” “strategy,” and “process” of coping. Endler and Parker announced their concept in 1992. According to them, the style for coping with stress is a typical, repeatable behavior on the part of the individual in a stressful situation. Strategy signifies defined actions. A process is a series of changing strategies aimed at a concrete problem or situation [Wrześniewski, 2000]. The authors identify three styles of coping with stress: concentration on task, concentration on emotion, and concentration on evading.

Studies on ways of coping with culture shock as presented in this article are based on a description of four styles of behavior, systematized as a result of description and an intersecting of two dimensions. The first of those dimensions is ease of adapting to changes in cultural surroundings (adaptation ease), understood as the ability to find happiness and a sense of activity in the new culture, the ability to benefit from good aspects of contact with alien customs and cultural creations fostering development of the individual. The second is knowledge on mechanisms active at the tangent point of culture and awareness of difficulties and challenges linked with the acculturation and cultural adaptation mechanisms (the intercultural view) [see Łuźniak, 2004].

## Operationalization of Variables

As in the case of the adapting of psychological tests from one culture to another, it is not sufficient to simply translate the wording of individual items and develop new standards. In the transfer of operationalization from anthropology to psychology, for example, it is necessary to compare the definitions of phenomena and their importance to the whole of the concept. For representatives of various cultures, concepts linked with values, adapting to cultural norms, or with describing human nature may have completely different meaning, as we wrote in the preceding sections of this article. Among representatives of specific fields of science, we observe a similar regularity [Witkowski, Iłski, 2000; Paluchowski, 2004]. Dialogue among scientists representing various views of the world is, in a sense, a dialogue among “scientific cultures.” Thus, in adapting scientific concepts other than psychological ones in the research described here, their operationalization

**Figure No. 1.** The intersection of two dimensions creates four styles for coping with culture shock



Source: Own studies.

using psychological tools was considered. Anthropological and sociological operationalization was not discussed. What was looked at was the utility of the given theoretical constructs for psychological research [compare with Łuzniak, Witkowski, 2006].

**The Y dependent variable** is a style of coping with culture shock understood as the development of specific methods of conduct and presenting defined views in contact with representatives and artifacts of an alien culture in the emotional, cognitive, and social functioning of the individual, including on the level of organizational efficiency.

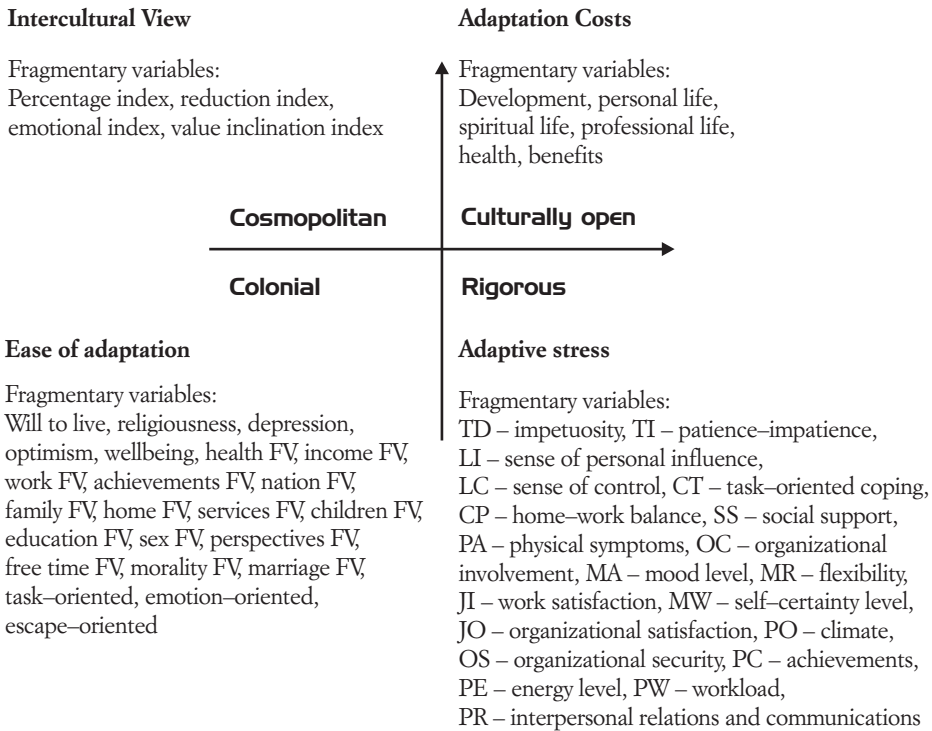
The method of operationalization applied following an attempt tied with a pilot study was the directed interview, intended to verify the style of coping with culture shock as presented by the examined person.

Below is a presentation of brief characterizations of individual styles. Their descriptions emerged as a result of the analysis of topical literature [Oberg, 1960; Marx, 2000; Berry, 1996; Cameron, Quinn, 2003] and as a result of the conducting of the pilot study.

**The cosmopolitan style** demonstrates little interest in questions of adaptation and the fear of others of that which is new and unknown. Moreover, it contains a declarative high ease and skill for adapting to new conditions and a tolerance for changes in the surroundings. A manager representing this style is a democrat who is effective in managing innovation, oriented towards the future, and continuously improving as well as adapting to new tasks and challenges [compare with Oberg, 1960; Cameron, Quinn, 2003].

**The culturally open style** reveals broad knowledge relating to the impact of culture shock symptoms as well as the simultaneously high ease and skill in adapting to alien cultural conditions. Its representatives declare sensing symptoms of culture shock, adding

Figure No. 2. Model of the investigated phenomena, noting all variables and groups of variables



Source: Own Studies.

its impact to costs. They are capable of predicting its effects, which helps them in taking remedial action. Such a manager would be effective in integrating multicultural teams and planning worker development [Marx, 2000; Cameron, Quinn, 2003].

**The colonial style** is characterized by persons declaring a low level of sensing of symptoms of culture shock as well as minimal interest in the effects of group adaptive processes through which they and their subordinates proceed. They have a low awareness as to the impact of the syndrome on emotions, identity, and the intellectual aspects of the functioning of the individual. At the same time, they display no desire for integration nor learning about the alien culture. A manager presenting this style tends to be the type that does not interfere in the work methods of his subordinates and is interested in attracting customers and market penetration, competitiveness, and meeting customer needs [Marx, 2000; Cameron, Quinn, 2003].

**The rigorous style** shows strong sensing and awareness of the impact of the symptoms of culture shock alongside an individual disdain for integration and no quest for un-

derstanding between his culture and someone else's. Representatives of the rigorous style tend to think that only one culture in its original "pure" form has the right to exist in the given organization and that that second one should be dominated and eliminated. Such a manager functions efficiently in an organizational culture with clearly defined dominant and subservient worker roles. He can effectively manage acculturative processes as well as control and coordinate activities [Marx, 2000; Berry, 1996; Cameron, Quinn, 2003].

### Selected Independent Variables

This article does not present all variables whose interaction with dependent variables was tested in the study. The article's topic, linked with accenting methodological problems instead of an all-encompassing description of the functioning of representatives of individual styles of coping with culture shock, makes it possible to restrict its scope to presenting the operationalization of selected independent variables [see Łuźniak, Witkowski, 2006].

**Variable X<sub>1</sub>** designates adaptation costs understood as psychological costs in the mental, somatic, and social sphere, as well as alternate costs—restrictions on achieving personal targets and desires. It is measured using a questionnaire for studying MN psychological costs as developed by J. Mesjasz [2005].

**Variable X<sub>2</sub>** designates professional adaptive stress understood as a combination of optimal levels of the professional stress factor as defined by Cooper, Kahn, and Williams, measured using the Pressure Management Indicator (PMI) with its Polish adaptation by Terelak and Lewandowska [2000]. The combination of results defining individual areas of stress is to serve as a psychological measure for a sense of professional acculturative stress as described by Oberg [1960], using terms defined in anthropological nomenclature subsequently translated into the language of psychological methodology thanks to application of the PMI scale.

### Comparison of Variables, Their Indicators, and Research Methods

The variables describing the study, their indicators, and methods of study have been collected below in order to illustrate and summarize the described research methodology.

#### Description of the Course of the Research

Employees of global organizations took part in the study. In their case it was not only a matter of acculturative stress, but also a dimension of their adapting their functioning to changed circumstances. They consisted of people responsible for creating a new, modified organizational culture in their own enterprise. The investigated persons are not merely "subject to the acculturative process." It is through them that the acculturation

**Table No. 1.** Variables, indicators, and research methods: A comparison

Syndrome – variable	Indicator	Research method
Style of breaking out of culture shock	Interview responses, analysis of qualitative data	Psychological interview
Adaptive costs	Achieved number of points in individual scales describing the psychological costs, quantitative and qualitative analysis	MN questionnaire
Adaptive stress	Number of points in the individual scales of the questionnaire, quantitative and qualitative analysis	PMI

Source: Own Study.

encompasses their colleagues and subordinates as well. Thus, the research is intended to observe conditions of effective cultural adaptation, combined with the observing of conditions of the “transfer” of a new culture to others.

A total of fifty–five people took part in the actual study. Among them were twenty–one women and thirty–four men. The age of those examined ranged from twenty–eight to thirty–nine. Everyone examined had a college education. The study was conducted in Poland in five corporations whose employees work in international teams on a daily basis as well as manage projects involving multi–year business–related stays in a culturally different environment.

The selection of examined persons for the sample was deliberate. Factors relating to work seniority, age, sex, types of organizational activity involving the examined person, position in the professional hierarchy, and country of “origin” of the organization and its culture were all monitored as a part of the study.

The investigated persons were subdivided into four groups following structured interviews. The groups represented the four above–described styles for breaking through culture shock. The results of the examined persons were classified as belonging to the given group on the basis of analyses of qualitative data from the interviews. Four competent judges took part in this classification. Subsequently, the four styles were mutually compared using a single–factor variance analysis.

**Research Results**

Detailed research results shall not be presented at this point. However, in order not to leave the reader without a sense of cognitive closure, a short description and interpretation of received results is presented below.

In analyzing the results of variables tied to manifestations of the **cosmopolitan** style, it is possible to state with a great deal of probability that such managers are oriented at continuous search for new possibilities and the improvement of the existing state of affairs. The cosmopolitan shall attempt to create a dynamic organizational culture and shall also, most probably, delegate powers. The external trappings of prestige and the amassing of power is not important to the cosmopolitan. Professional satisfaction tends rather to be linked with a sense of high value of own work.

The cosmopolitan style identifies the highest level of costs incurred in the realm of spiritual development, transcendental experiences, and moral dilemmas—the highest result of the variable describing these costs as compared with the remaining styles. Thus, it is a style whose representatives are battling with a need to accept a “double standard,” which is in contrast to their higher, spiritual feelings. It is therefore possible to submit the conclusion that these high spiritual costs are, in a sense, the price that cosmopolitans pay for “not getting tied down,” “knowing how to live in any environment,” and “not applying great weight to risk related with professional functioning on foreign soil.” As to stress-generating factors in the realm of professional life, representatives of this style complain the most of all the examined groups about excessive obligations and being forced to take decisions under conditions of a deficit of information. That deficit is a phenomenon that is neither strange nor surprising, if one considers the characteristics of the cosmopolitan style, a style that embodies a declarative ease of adaptation, but low motivation to seek information on another culture, low desire to learn about it in depth, and the same minimal motivational approach to problems of adaptation at the tangent point of cultures [see Łuźniak, 2006].

The **culturally open** style is the style of managers who respect various points of view. Such a manager creates a culture that puts a high price on teamwork skills, where tradition and openness to new solutions is equally important. It may also be suggested that this is a culture that is, to a great extent, created by managers, proponents of participatory decisions as described in the studies of Mączyński and his co-workers [1996, 1997, 1998].

Contact with representatives of other cultures seems to be a source of great satisfaction for those tending towards this style. They assess it positively.

Up to this point, it may seem that the characteristics of the culturally open style and the cosmopolitan style are rather similar, differing only in the sphere of building deep and intimate relations. However, this difference becomes significant upon analysis of the psychological costs accompanying the two styles. It seems that the culturally open style is singular among all the other styles as the one having the lowest psychological costs. None of the functional spheres as described in Mesjasz's [2005] psychological cost concept are encumbered by high costs in the case of the open style. Thus, these are people who do not surrender time for spending with those close to them, they foster friendship and close, in-

timate relations, and do not limit their contact to exclusively the “official” sphere. Results also lead to the conclusion that the style of breaking through culture shock linked with such skills will result in less conflicts in the team as well as greater ease in their solving, and less pressure in the workplace with respect to its intercultural nature. Professional satisfaction also seems to balance out all consciously taken risks of acculturation failure in this case.

**Rigorous** managers seem to be people who effectively function in a restricted culture created by leaders, prominent specialists who care for order as well as keeping to official procedures and priorly agreed arrangements. Rigorists stand out from among the compared groups by their negative assessment and generally negative emotional sign in connection with questions of cultural adaptation. This style also stands out in results pointing to a low level of motivation to act in areas of personal uncertainty. It may be concluded that rigorists—generally aware of the possibility of complications at the tangent point of cultures—treat the risk of such occurrences as a necessary evil and an unpleasant element of work in a global organization that is something of a price to pay for filling a visible position in an international corporation. In a sense, in this case one may speak of a style that strives to restrict emotions and make a rational peace with unpleasantness related to the acculturative stress and a quest for satisfaction in other aspect of one’s own work.

As shown by the analysis of results, satisfaction is drawn by rigorists from various types of external signs of status and power. This is a style whose theoretical description includes a need for a clearly defined hierarchy of authority and assumes the possibility of dominance of views by only one side. The resultant variables confirm this description of the functioning of the rigorists. They bear witness to the fact that a significant source of life’s satisfaction as well as the maintenance of the *status quo* comes down to income level and the material trappings of status.

As to the description of the competencies of managers in various types of organizational cultures, the **colonists** potentially seem to be the best adapted for functioning in a culture where the function of manager is mainly based on enforcing task performance and monitoring the results of the activities of workers. They concentrate on market competition and rivalry.

The picture of the colonist as depicted in the results of variable analyses forwards the judgement that this is a style seen in people who usually look at reality in a rather pessimistic manner, without the faith in easy adaptation characteristic of the cosmopolitans, for example, and without the dependence on accumulated information and official procedures as seen in the rigorists. However, such a conclusion requires further research for its justifiability. It is also possible that such a pessimistic picture of professional reality is something of a “autohandicap” allowing a lowering of stress, when the manager–colonist cannot prevent the risky situations that he fears [Łuzniak, 2006].

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