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Innate Psychological Resources, Cultural Intelligence, and Cross-Cultural Adaptation: A Pre-Hire Selection Framework for Employee Performance in Maldivian SMEs

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Abstract: The purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore the past literature to show the relationship between innate psychological resource and cultural intelligence as well as cross-cultural adaptation. Similarly, this conceptual paper reviews the past literature to show the direct relationship between cultural intelligence and performance as well as the relationship between cross-cultural adaptations and performance. Several studies conducted in the past were reviewed and theoretical propositions are made based on the past literature. Four theoretical propositions are formulated based on the recent available literature. These are (1) innate psychological resource has a positive effect on cultural intelligence, (2) innate psychological resource has a positive effect on cross-cultural adjustment, (3) cultural intelligence has positive effect on employee performance, (4) cross-cultural adjustment has a positive effect on employee performance. The overall conclusion is that improving innate psychological resource could improve cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adjustment leading to high performance among the employees. The practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Innate psychological resources, Cultural Intelligence, Cross-Cultural Adjustments, Employee performance.

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

In the Maldivian economic landscape, foreign labor has become an indispensable structural component, driving key sectors such as tourism, construction, and domestic services (F. E. Hussain, Fayyaz, *et al.*, 2024; Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Rauf, 2019)This high dependency creates a unique socio-economic environment where intense and frequent intercultural encounters are a daily reality, particularly in frontline, high-contact roles (Khan *et al.*, 2023; Rauf, 2019; Shafina, 2021). Many of these positions are situated within small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that often operate without the formal human resources capacity or structured employee development programs common in larger corporations (Hussain *et al.*, 2024; Shakeela *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, effective performance in this context hinges not merely on an employee's technical skills but on their inherent capability to understand, adapt to, and function effectively within a complex host culture (Mohamed *et al.*, 2024; Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2011; Shakeela & Cooper, 2009). This operational challenge is amplified by observable cultural frictions, which can range from misunderstandings of local etiquette to conflicts over social norms (McCarthy & King, 2024; Shenaan & Schänzel, 2024), underscoring a critical need for employers to accurately identify and select individuals predisposed to succeed in these demanding roles from the moment of hire (Mohamed *et al.*, 2024).

The academic literature provides a robust theoretical lens for this challenge through the concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ), which Earley and Ang (2003) originally defined as an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ang & Dyne, 2008; Toumi & Su, 2025). CQ is a validated, multidimensional construct comprising four distinct but related facets: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral (Ang, Rockstuhl, *et al.*, 2015; Toumi & Su, 2025; Van Dyne *et al.*, 2012). As Ang and Van Dyne explain, these dimensions work in concert to enable culturally appropriate interactions (Ang, Rockstuhl, *et al.*, 2015; Van Dyne *et al.*, 2012). A substantial body of empirical research confirms that higher CQ consistently predicts superior outcomes, including cross-cultural adjustment, task performance, and leadership effectiveness (Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2011; Toumi & Su, 2025; Hassan & Hamid, 2025). For instance, multiple studies have demonstrated that motivational CQ is a particularly strong predictor of work, general, and interaction adjustment (Toumi & Su, 2025). The literature confirms that CQ is a significant predictor of an expatriate's success, enabling them to meet role expectations and build effective relationships in their international assignments (Morin & Talbot, 2023; Toumi & Su, 2025).

Despite its explanatory power, the application of CQ research has been overwhelmingly skewed

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toward developmental interventions for existing employees, leaving critical pre-hire diagnostic questions underdeveloped (Hassan & Hamid, 023; Toumi & Su, 2025). The majority of studies have focused on the expatriation practices and post-entry support systems of large, well-resourced multinational enterprises, which limits the applicability of their findings for smaller firms. This research gap is particularly acute in the Maldivian context, where resource-constrained SMEs face systemic vulnerabilities in the recruitment ecosystem, such as fraudulent recruitment and opaque agent networks, that dramatically amplify the consequences of a poor hiring decision (Hussain, Fayyaz, *et al.,* 2024; Khan *et al.,* 2023). For an SME, the cost of a hiring error is not merely financial; it includes tangible risks of community friction, diminished service quality, and high employee turnover, all of which threaten the enterprise's sustainability (Hussain *et al.,* 2024; Mohamed *et al.,* 2024).

Addressing this gap requires shifting the focus from post-hire development to pre-hire selection, which makes personality research a highly promising avenue for a solution. International literature consistently demonstrates that certain stable, dispositional traits are reliable antecedents to cultural intelligence, making them ideal for a diagnostic framework (Ang, Rockstuhl, *et al.,* 2015; Toumi & Su, 2025). For example, personality traits such as openness to experience are shown to foster CQ development (Toumi & Su, 2025). Complementing this, research by Chu and Zhu (2023) established a significant positive correlation between CQ, psychological resilience, and cross-cultural adaptation, confirming that resilience acts as a crucial mediator in the adaptation process. While the evidence for these individual links is well-established, these innate psychological resources (IPR) have not been systematically integrated into a coherent, pre-hire selection model that is both theoretically grounded and practically applicable to the challenges faced by Maldivian SMEs.

Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to synthesize CQ theory and personality research to develop a selection-oriented framework that identifies innate psychological resources, specifically Openness to Experience and Resilience, as proximal antecedents of Cultural Intelligence (Chu & Zhu, 2023). The proposed model posits that these inherent traits facilitate the development of an individual's CQ, which in turn predicts their cross-cultural adjustment and subsequent job performance (Toumi & Su, 2025). This framework is intended to offer SMEs a theory-driven, diagnostic approach to reduce hiring risk in high-contact, community-embedded roles, thereby addressing a critical void in both the academic literature and the practical needs of the Maldivian labor market (Hussain, Ahmed, *et al.,* 2024). The following discussion will elaborate on the theoretical foundations of this model, building the conceptual linkages between its core components to establish a practical framework for pre-hire selection.

Research Questions

To guide this conceptual development, the paper addresses the following research questions:

- How do Innate Psychological Resources function as antecedents to Cultural Intelligence?
- Through what theoretical pathways does CQ influence Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Employee Performance?
- How can the proposed antecedent-based CQ model be translated into a practical pre-hire selection tool for Maldivian SMEs?
- The following discussion will elaborate on the theoretical foundations of this model, building the conceptual linkages between its core components to establish a practical framework for pre-hire selection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of key concepts.

Employee Performance

For a pre-hire selection framework to be effective, it must target a clear and relevant definition of on-the-job success. In the expatriate context, job performance is a multifaceted concept that has evolved from early theories of scientific management to more nuanced, culturally sensitive models (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). While some scholars define it by the time and energy expatriates dedicate to their roles (Qureshi *et al.,* 2017) or the achievement of specific assignment objectives (Sahoo *et al.,* 2022), contemporary research emphasizes a multidimensional approach, often distinguishing between an expatriate's effectiveness in their formal duties and their ability to adapt to the broader work environment (Liao *et al.,* 2021).

Crucially for this paper's framework, expatriate job performance is now widely understood as a construct comprising two primary dimensions (Bhatti *et al.,* 2012). The first is task performance, which refers to how well expatriates complete their

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formally assigned duties and responsibilities. The second is contextual performance, which encompasses behaviors that support the broader social and psychological environment of the workplace, such as adaptability and positive interpersonal relations (Zakariya *et al.,* 2019). This distinction is particularly salient for the proposed model, as task performance is theoretically linked to an individual's work adjustment, while contextual performance is a direct outcome of their interaction adjustment, as conceptualized in the cross-cultural adjustment framework (Black *et al.,* 1991; Hua *et al.,* 2020).

Therefore, for the purpose of this research, expatriate job performance is defined as a dual-faceted outcome encompassing the extent to which expatriates not only fulfill their assigned duties (task performance) but also successfully adapt to the host environment and contribute positively to its social fabric (contextual performance), thereby achieving the overall objectives of their international assignment.

Cultural Intelligence

The concept of CQ was first conceptualized by Earley and Ang (2003) as an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ang, Van Dyne, *et al.,* 2015; Ang & Dyne, 2008; Lankut & Yari, 2017; Ott & Michailova, 2018). It is a form of non-academic intelligence that targets a person's competence to adapt seamlessly to environments with cultural variety (Solomon & Steyn, 2017). Unlike other intelligences such as emotional (EQ) or social intelligence (SI), which are often culture-bound, CQ is conceptualized as a culture-free capability that transfers across different cultural contexts because it specifically addresses the ability to function in situations characterized by cultural diversity (Ang, Van Dyne, *et al.,* 2015; Ang & Dyne, 2008; Setti *et al.,* 2022). The most widely adopted framework posits that CQ is a multidimensional construct comprising four key dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral CQ (Ang, Van Dyne, *et al.,* 2015; Setti *et al.,* 2022; Van Dyne *et al.,* 2012). Metacognitive CQ involves the higher-order mental processes used to acquire and understand cultural knowledge, including planning for and checking assumptions during intercultural interactions (Ang, Van Dyne, *et al.,* 2015, 2015; Setti *et al.,* 2022; Solomon & Steyn, 2017). Cognitive CQ refers to the specific knowledge an individual has about the norms, practices, and conventions in different cultures, acquired through education and experience (Ang, Van Dyne, *et al.,* 2015; Setti *et al.,* 2022; Van Dyne *et al.,* 2012). Motivational CQ is the energy and drive directed toward learning about and engaging in cross-cultural situations, reflecting a person's intrinsic interest and self-efficacy in adapting (Ang, Van Dyne, *et al.,* 2015; Setti *et al.,* 2022; Solomon & Steyn, 2017; Van Dyne *et al.,* 2012; Yuan *et al.,* 2023). Finally, Behavioral CQ is the ability to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions in culturally diverse settings, including adapting speech, tone, and gestures (Ang, Van Dyne, *et al.,* 2015; Setti *et al.,* 2022; Van Dyne *et al.,* 2012). While this four-factor model is dominant, other scholars like Thomas (2006) have proposed an alternative conceptualization based on knowledge, mindfulness, and behavior, emphasizing the conscious processing of cultural cues (Lankut & Yari, 2017; Toumi & Su, 2025). For the purpose of this study and its focus on a pre-hire selection framework, Cultural Intelligence is defined as the central, multidimensional capability, encompassing the metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral faculties, that enables expatriates to achieve cross-cultural adjustment and successful job performance in culturally diverse work environments (Ang, Van Dyne, *et al.,* 2015; Chu & Zhu, 2023; Setti *et al.,* 2022; Solomon & Steyn, 2017; Van Dyne *et al.,* 2012).

Cross-Cultural Adaptation

A central premise of the proposed selection framework is that identifying candidates with a high potential for successful CCA is predictive of their eventual on-the-job performance (Liao *et al.,* 2021). CCA is defined as the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity an individual achieves while living and working in a new cultural environment (Lankut & Yari, 2017; Liao *et al.,* 2021; Noman *et al.,* 2023). It is a dynamic process through which an expatriate reduces the uncertainty and stress associated with a foreign context, ultimately determining their success or failure in an international assignment (Liao *et al.,* 2021; Morin & Talbot, 2023). While early models described this process through stages like the U-curve hypothesis, contemporary expatriate research overwhelmingly relies on the multidimensional framework established by Black and Stephens (1989) (Hua *et al.,* 2020; Noman *et al.,* 2023; Setti *et al.,* 2022). This model conceptualizes CCA not as a single outcome but as a composite of three distinct, yet interconnected, domains of adjustment. The first, Work Adjustment, refers to an expatriate's psychological

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comfort with new job responsibilities, performance standards, expectations, and the overall work environment in the host country; successful work adjustment is critical for achieving high levels of task performance (Liao *et al.,* 2021; Noman *et al.,* 2023; Ott & Michailova, 2018). The second domain, Interaction Adjustment, involves the comfort and effectiveness an individual feel when socializing and communicating with host country nationals in both professional and non-work settings, a dimension directly linked to an expatriate's ability to engage in positive contextual performance (Noman *et al.,* 2023; Ott & Michailova, 2018). Finally, General Adjustment concerns an expatriate's adaptation to the broader, non-work aspects of the host country, including adjusting to general living conditions such as the food, transportation, housing, and local customs (Liao *et al.,* 2021; Noman *et al.,* 2023; Ott & Michailova, 2018; Setti *et al.,* 2022). Successful adaptation across these three domains signifies that an expatriate feels psychologically at ease and is not hindered by the challenges of the new environment. Within the proposed framework, CCA serves as the critical mediating outcome that links an individual's CQ to their multifaceted job performance.

Innate Psychological Resources: Openness to Experience and Resilience

The proposed framework posits that an individual's potential for developing and effectively applying cultural intelligence is fundamentally rooted in a set of stable, innate psychological resources (Ang & Dyne, 2008). This study identifies two critical antecedents that are assessable pre-hire: the personality trait of Openness to Experience and the psychological capacity for Resilience (Toumi & Su, 2025; Jameel, Solih & Hassan, 2025).

Openness to Experience is a core personality dimension within the Five-Factor Model that describes an individual's preference for variety, intellectual curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity, and receptiveness to new ideas and unconventional values (Falavarjani & Irandust, 2017; Holden *et al.,* 2021). Individuals high in this trait are characterized by a vivid imagination, a willingness to challenge assumptions, and a deep interest in both their inner and outer worlds (Espinola, 2015). Crucially, a substantial body of research identifies Openness to Experience as a primary antecedent to CQ (Depaula *et al.,* 2016; Espinola, 2015; Ott & Michailova, 2018). Studies have demonstrated that it is positively associated with all four dimensions of CQ, suggesting that an inherent curiosity and willingness to engage with novelty are foundational to developing cultural awareness and skills (Depaula *et al.,* 2016; Sousa *et al.,* 2019). Specifically, this trait predicts an individual's motivation to explore new cultures and their capacity for the higher-order cognitive processing required for metacognitive CQ (Depaula *et al.,* 2016; Espinola, 2015).

Resilience is the psychological capacity that enables an individual to adapt effectively to adversity, stress, trauma, and frustration, allowing them to "bounce back" and return to previous levels of functioning (Chu & Zhu, 2023; Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2019). In the context of expatriation, which is frequently characterized by high levels of stress, uncertainty, and culture shock, resilience is a critical personal resource (Hua *et al.,* 2020; Hassan, Ali & Imran, 2024). Multiple research confirms that psychological resilience is significantly and positively correlated with successful cross-cultural adaptation (Chu & Zhu, 2023; Toumi & Su, 2025). While some studies show that CQ can enhance resilience, the proposed framework identifies resilience as a foundational capacity: it is the innate psychological engine that allows an individual to persevere through the challenges of adjustment, thereby enabling the effective application of their CQ competencies under pressure.

Together, Openness to Experience (the cognitive and experiential willingness to engage with novelty) and Resilience (the affective capacity to withstand adversity) constitute the core innate psychological resources of the proposed selection framework. They represent the fundamental, stable traits that predict an individual's potential to develop and leverage CQ, making them essential predictive indicators for successful performance in a multicultural work environment.

Critical Review of the underlying theory

Cross-Cultural Adjustment Theory

Cross-Cultural Adjustment Theory, as conceptualized by Black and his colleagues, was developed in response to the high failure rates of international assignments and the lack of a strong theoretical foundation in earlier expatriation research (Morin & Talbot, 2023; Noman *et al.,* 2023). According to Black et al. (1991), international adjustment is distinct from domestic adjustment because expatriates must adapt not only to new job roles and organizational practices but also to unfamiliar social norms, languages, and

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general living conditions (Liao *et al.,* 2021). The model identifies several key factors that shape the adjustment process, drawing on insights from both domestic and international research. Antecedents such as pre-departure cross-cultural training, previous overseas experience, and organizational selection mechanisms influence expatriates before they leave their home country (Morin & Talbot, 2023; Noman *et al.,* 2023). After arrival, individual skills—such as self-efficacy, relational abilities, and perceptual skills—and non-work factors like family adjustment and cultural novelty become highly relevant (Hua *et al.,* 2020; Ott & Michailova, 2018). The presence of these positive factors facilitates a smoother and more effective adjustment process.

Black et al. (1991) also stress that adjustment is not a monolithic construct but rather a multidimensional process (Noman *et al.,* 2023). The theory delineates adjustment across three distinct, though interrelated, dimensions: Work Adjustment, concerning the adaptation to new job tasks and responsibilities; Interaction Adjustment, involving comfort with socializing and communicating with host-country nationals; and General Adjustment, which relates to the overall adaptation to the non-work environment, including aspects like food, transportation, and living conditions (Hua *et al.,* 2020; Liao *et al.,* 2021; Noman *et al.,* 2023). Successful adjustment is achieved as expatriates reduce uncertainty and psychological discomfort by learning and practicing culturally appropriate behaviors, thereby becoming more receptive to the host society's values and norms (Noman *et al.,* 2023).

By combining these perspectives, the CCA framework provides a robust model for understanding how individuals navigate the psychological and sociocultural challenges of living and working abroad. It also offers a foundation for developing practical strategies that organizations can use to support their expatriates. Other studies have subsequently used this framework to examine the direct link between adjustment and expatriate performance (Lankut & Yari, 2017). BhaskarShrinivas et al. (2005), in a major meta-analysis, confirmed the model proposed by Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991) and provided strong evidence that the work, interaction, and general adjustment dimensions each contribute uniquely to performance outcomes. Further research has consistently demonstrated that well-adjusted expatriates are more likely to perform their tasks effectively, meet organizational goals, and build crucial relationships in the host country (Alkhoraif, 2024; Setti *et al.,* 2022). Taken together, this body of research provides strong empirical support for using Cross-Cultural Adjustment Theory as the foundational framework for explaining and predicting expatriate performance.

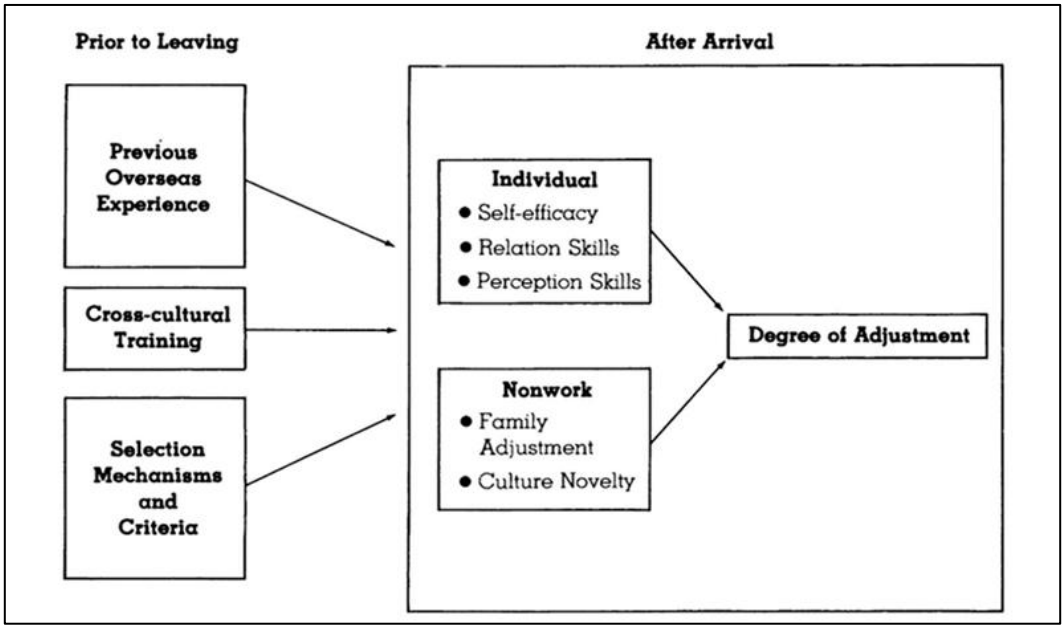


Figure 1-The integrative framework of cross-cultural adjustment
Source: Black et al. (1991).

The model illustrates how various antecedent factors (individual, job, organizational, and non-work) influence three core dimensions of adjustment: general, interaction, and work. A key

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feature is the distinction between the anticipatory and in-country adjustment phases, demonstrating how pre-departure training and expectations shape the subsequent adaptation process.

Conceptual framework

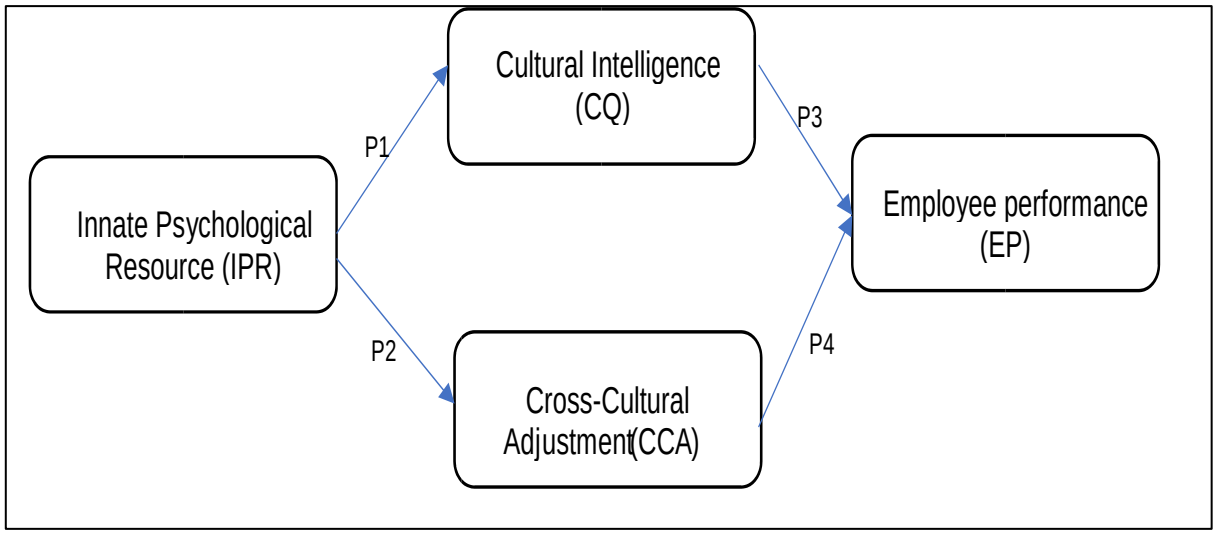


Figure 2. The proposed conceptual framework

Proposition 1: IPR has a positive effect on CQ

IPR, defined in this framework as the combined effect of the personality trait Openness to Experience and the capacity for Resilience, are posited to be foundational antecedents that positively influence an individual's CQ. This proposition is built on the premise that these stable, pre-existing characteristics create the necessary cognitive and affective conditions for an individual to develop and effectively utilize their cultural competencies (Puthiya, 2025).

A substantial body of research consistently identifies Openness to Experience as a primary predictor of CQ (Depaula *et al.*, 2016; Sousa *et al.*, 2019; Toumi & Su, 2025). Individuals high in this trait exhibit intellectual curiosity, a preference for novelty, and a receptiveness to new ideas, which are essential for developing cultural knowledge (Cognitive CQ) and cultural awareness (Metacognitive CQ) (Depaula *et al.*, 2016). Studies confirm that Openness to Experience is positively associated with all four dimensions of CQ, as open individuals are more motivated to explore unfamiliar cultures (Motivational CQ) and are more likely to adapt their actions in crosscultural interactions (Behavioral CQ) (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Sousa *et al.*, 2019). Their inherent curiosity drives them to seek out and engage with diverse cultural information, providing the raw material for building a sophisticated understanding of cultural differences (Ang & Dyne, 2008; Setti *et al.*, 2022).

Resilience, the capacity to adapt and "bounce back" from stress and adversity, serves as the psychological engine that enables the effective application and development of CQ, particularly in challenging expatriate environments (Toumi & Su, 2025). Cross-cultural adaptation is an inherently stressful process, and setbacks are common (Hua *et al.*, 2020). Resilience provides the psychological fortitude necessary to persevere through these difficulties, allowing individuals to persist in the demanding experiential learning processes that build CQ (Ott & Michailova, 2018).

Specifically, resilience underpins an individual's Motivational CQ, sustaining their confidence and drive to engage in unfamiliar cultural settings even after facing obstacles or misunderstandings (Lankut & Yari, 2017; Setti *et al.*, 2022). While some research positions resilience as an outcome of CQ (Chu & Zhu, 2023), this framework argues it is a foundational resource; without the capacity to endure initial failures and culture shock, the motivation to learn and adapt would diminish, thereby limiting CQ's development (Gollapudi, 2025) .

Together, Openness to Experience provides the cognitive and experiential willingness to engage with cultural novelty, while Resilience provides the affective fortitude to endure the challenges that such engagement entails. Therefore, it is proposed that individuals who possess a higher level of these combined Innate Psychological Resources will be significantly more likely to develop and possess

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high Cultural Intelligence (Suthari & Manam, 2025) .

Proposition 2: IPR have a positive effect on CCA.

Building on the direct link to CQ, IPR are also proposed to have a direct positive effect on an individual's CCA. While much of IPR's influence on adaptation is expected to be channeled through CQ, both Openness to Experience and Resilience possess qualities that directly facilitate the process of adapting to a new cultural environment.

The trait of Openness to Experience has been shown to be a significant predictor of successful expatriate adaptation (Falavarjani & Irandust, 2017; Toumi & Su, 2025). Individuals who are inherently open-minded and curious are less likely to hold rigid cultural assumptions and are more receptive to the host country's norms and values (Falavarjani & Irandust, 2017; Waal & Born, 2020). This predisposition reduces the psychological friction and resistance that often impede adaptation. Their natural interest in novelty leads them to view the challenges of a new culture not as threats, but as opportunities for learning and growth, which directly fosters a more positive adaptation experience across the general, interaction, and work domains (Falavarjani & Irandust, 2017). This inherent flexibility and positive framing of new experiences contribute directly to psychological comfort and reduced stress in the host environment (Waal & Born, 2020).

Similarly, Resilience is a critical personal resource that directly impacts an individual's ability to cope with the stressors of expatriation (Chu & Zhu, 2023; Toumi & Su, 2025). Research consistently confirms that higher levels of psychological resilience are significantly and positively correlated with successful cross-cultural adaptation, leading to fewer socio-cultural difficulties (Chu & Zhu, 2023; Toumi & Su, 2025). Resilient individuals are better equipped to manage feelings of stress, anxiety, and culture shock that are characteristic of the adaptation process (Chu & Zhu, 2023). This capacity allows them to maintain psychological well-being and functional stability even when faced with significant adversity. By enabling individuals to "bounce back" from negative experiences and regulate their emotional responses, resilience directly contributes to a smoother and more successful adaptation to work, social interactions, and general life in a new country (A-Clottey, 2025) .

In summary, while CQ acts as a primary mediator, the foundational traits of Openness to Experience and Resilience also exert a direct, positive influence on an expatriate's adaptation.

Openness provides the cognitive flexibility and curiosity to embrace a new culture, while Resilience offers the emotional stability to withstand its inherent challenges. Therefore, individuals with stronger IPR are better equipped to achieve successful CCA (Ratnayake, 2025) .

Proposition 3: CQ have positive effect on EP.

CQ is a critical individual capability that directly predicts an expatriate's success in culturally diverse environments (Rockstuhl *et al.,* 2011). A substantial body of research demonstrates that CQ equips individuals with the necessary mindset and skills to navigate intercultural complexities, leading to more effective performance outcomes (Morin & Talbot, 2023; Ott & Michailova, 2018). While a portion of CQ's influence is mediated through adaptation, many studies confirm a direct, positive relationship between CQ and both task and contextual performance, positioning it as a key antecedent to overall job effectiveness in international assignments (Solomon & Steyn, 2017; Toumi & Su, 2025).

The direct link between CQ and performance is best understood through the distinct contributions of its four dimensions. Metacognitive and Cognitive CQ directly enhance Task Performance; expatriates with high metacognitive abilities can better plan and strategize for intercultural encounters, while those with strong cognitive CQ use their cultural knowledge to make more effective decisions (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Solomon & Steyn, 2017). Conversely, Motivational and Behavioral CQ are strong predictors of Contextual Performance. High motivational CQ provides the intrinsic drive to persist through challenges and build relationships, while high behavioral CQ enables expatriates to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions, fostering trust and smoother collaboration with host-country colleagues (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Rockstuhl *et al.,* 2011). Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive toolkit that allows expatriates to perform their duties effectively and build the social capital necessary for success (Rockstuhl *et al.,* 2011; Solomon & Steyn, 2017).

Within the proposed framework, CQ functions as the pivotal competency that translates an

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individual's innate psychological resources into effective action (Ott & Michailova, 2018). While Cross-Cultural Adaptation is the most proximal mediator to performance, CQ is the capability that enables both effective adaptation and has its own direct influence on performance outcomes (Ott & Michailova, 2018). Models of expatriate success increasingly recognize that without the foundational ability to process and act on cultural cues that CQ provides, an expatriate is less likely to adapt successfully or perform to their full potential (Ott & Michailova, 2018). Therefore, an individual's ability to understand, reason, and behave effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity is a primary determinant of their performance (Rubinstein, 2024).

Proposition 4: CCA has a positive effect on EP.
Cross-Cultural Adaptation is arguably the most critical and proximal determinant of expatriate performance (Liao *et al.*, 2021). Numerous studies across diverse contexts confirm a strong, positive, and direct relationship between an expatriate's level of adaptation and their subsequent job performance (Liao *et al.*, 2021; Morin & Talbot, 2023). When expatriates successfully adapt, they experience less stress and greater psychological comfort with their new environment, which allows them to allocate more personal and cognitive resources toward achieving their work-related goals (Setti *et al.*, 2022).

The CCA framework's multidimensional nature provides a clear explanation for this link. Work Adaptation, the adjustment to new job tasks, performance expectations, and workplace norms, is directly tied to an individual's Task Performance (Liao *et al.*, 2021; Noman *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, Interaction adaptation, the comfort and effectiveness in communicating and building relationships with host-country nationals, is a key driver of contextual performance, which includes fostering collaboration and acting as a good organizational citizen (Liao *et al.*, 2021). Finally, general adaptation to the non-work environment (e.g., food, living conditions) reduces overall stress, which supports the psychological well-being necessary to sustain high performance in both task and contextual domains (Noman *et al.*, 2023).

Many theoretical models and empirical studies position CCA as the crucial mediator that translates an expatriate's personal attributes and skills into tangible performance outcomes (Morin & Talbot, 2023; Solomon & Steyn, 2017; Stoermer *et al.*, 2021). Capabilities such as CQ or innate resources like Resilience and Openness to Experience exert their full influence on performance largely by first enabling the individual to successfully adapt (Liao *et al.*, 2021; Ott & Michailova, 2018). This "adaptation-performance" paradigm underscores that without successful adaptation, an expatriate's potential is unlikely to be fully realized, regardless of their other competencies. Therefore, the degree to which an expatriate adapts to their work, social, and general environment is a primary driver of their professional success on an international assignment (Benneh, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This conceptual framework establishes that IPR, defined as the combination of Openness to Experience and Resilience, are the foundational predictors of EP within the unique, communityembedded context of Maldivian SMEs. The central contribution of this paper is its strategic pivot from a reactive, developmental paradigm to a proactive, diagnostic one. It contends that the most effective human resource strategy for international assignments begins not with post-hire intervention, but with the pre-hire identification of individuals who are psychologically predisposed to thrive in culturally demanding environments.

The model posits a clear causal pathway wherein these stable personality traits directly enhance an individual's CQ and facilitate their Cross-Cultural Adaptation. It further delineates the critical mediating roles of these constructs, demonstrating how innate dispositions are translated into the malleable capabilities (CQ) and adaptive states (CCA) that are the proximal drivers of Expatriate Performance. By tracing this progression from inherent traits to tangible workplace outcomes, the framework provides a theoretically grounded and robust basis for expatriate selection.

Ultimately, this paper concludes that an individual's innate psychological composition is the most fundamental predictor of their ability to navigate the challenges of an international assignment. By prioritizing the assessment of Openness to Experience and Resilience, Maldivian SMEs can create a more effective, evidence-based selection process. This approach enables organizations to build a resilient and culturally agile workforce from the outset, thereby securing a critical source of competitive advantage in an increasingly globalized market.

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Implications of the Proposed Framework

The pre-hire selection framework, cantered on Innate Psychological Resources, offers significant theoretical and practical implications for the fields of international human resource management and cross-cultural studies.

Theoretical Implications

First, it proposes a strategic paradigm shift in expatriate management, moving the primary focus from post-hire developmental interventions to pre-hire diagnostic selection. While the value of training is acknowledged in the broader literature, this framework posits that for resourceconstrained SMEs in culturally sensitive contexts, the predictive power of innate traits offers a more efficient and foundational basis for success.

Second, the paper contributes to the nomological network of CQ and CCA by conceptualizing Openness to Experience and Resilience as a unified construct of IPR. This integration suggests that these traits do not act in isolation but form a synergistic psychological foundation. This perspective provides a more holistic understanding of the dispositional antecedents of cultural competence, framing them as a combined resource pool that fuels both the capacity to learn (CQ) and the fortitude to adapt (CCA).

Finally, the model offers a more nuanced understanding of the causal pathways linking personality to performance. By proposing both a direct effect of IPR on CCA and an indirect effect mediated by CQ, it clarifies the distinct mechanisms at play. This suggests that while CQ is a critical capability that translates IPR into effective cross-cultural functioning, innate traits also have a direct, unmediated impact on an individual's ability to achieve psychological comfort and stability in a new environment.

Practical and Managerial Implications

The practical applications of this framework are direct and actionable, particularly for Maldivian SMEs and similar organizations. The most significant implication is the call to redesign expatriate recruitment and selection protocols. Managers and human resource professionals should shift from traditional experience-based hiring to a more evidence-based, psychometric approach. This involves incorporating validated assessment tools to measure candidates' levels of Openness to Experience and Resilience early in the selection process.

Furthermore, this framework provides a clear business case for strategic resource allocation. For SMEs with limited budgets, investing in robust, scientifically-validated selection instruments is likely to yield a higher return than allocating those same funds to generic, post-hire cultural training programs. By selecting individuals who are psychologically predisposed to succeed, organizations can reduce the risk of costly assignment failures and minimize the need for extensive remedial support.

Finally, the model can inform talent management beyond initial selection. Identifying employees with high IPR can help organizations build a talent pool of "global-ready" professionals. These individuals can be earmarked for future international assignments, leadership development programs, and roles requiring high levels of adaptability and intercultural interaction, ensuring the organization has a sustainable pipeline of culturally agile leaders.

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