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Religious expatriates' cultural intelligence and adaptation: The role of intrinsic motivation for successful expatriation

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to provide new insights into religious expatriates' cultural intelligence, adaptation and the role of motivation. Drawing mainly from the theory of intelligence (Sternberg, 1999) and theory of self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 2000; 1991), the study posits that cultural intelligence of a religious expatriate is positively and significantly related to his or her psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Moreover, the study hypothesizes that intrinsic motivation, as a type of motivation, plays a significant role in moderating the relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptation (both psychological and sociocultural).

Design/methodology/approach – One hundred ten (n=110) religious expatriates from various religious communities were surveyed. They were asked to rate their cultural intelligence, intrinsic motivation and adaptation (i.e., psychological and sociocultural).

Findings – The results demonstrate that cultural intelligence is positively and significantly related to both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation, as a type of motivation, moderates the relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptation (both psychological and sociocultural).

Originality/value – The study contributes to the limited studies on non-corporate expatriation focusing mainly on religious expatriation. In addition, it adds value by generating new insights into the importance not only of cultural intelligence but also of intrinsic motivation in ensuring high levels of psychological and sociocultural adaptation. It further offers a number of practical insights that can be relevant for both corporate and non-corporate expatriates.

Introduction

Corporate expatriation has been studied extensively in the areas of international business, international human resource management and career development (e.g., Kraimer, Bolino and Mead, 2016; Gonzalez-Loureiro, Kiessling and Dabic, 2015; Takeuchi, 2010; Herman and Tetrick, 2009; Reiche, Harzing and Kraimer, 2009; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007). These studies have highlighted the importance of adjustment among corporate expatriates (e.g., Ren et al. 2014; Firth et al., 2014, Takeuchi, 2010; Farh et al., 2010) but gaps remain in the literature in terms of understanding expatriation outside the confines of business organizations. McNulty and Brewster (2017) pointed out that the dearth of research on non-corporate expatriation can be attributed to the narrow conceptualization of expatriation as being sent overseas mainly by a multinational firm. The narrow corporate conceptualization of expatriation is limiting and tends not to pay attention to other forms of expatriation such as in religious communities. Religious communities, by virtue of their mission to evangelize and engage in international humanitarian work, heavily engage in expatriation (Oberholster and Doss, 2017; Oberholster et al., 2013). Religious expatriation has been shown to be more challenging given a perceived lack of support compared to support extended in the corporate expatriation domain (e.g., Navara and James, 2002). While initial studies on religious expatriation provide important insights, there are still areas that need careful examination, particularly the role of other individual-level factors and how these factors can lead to better adjustment and adaptation among religious expatriates.

This study aims to address the abovementioned gaps in the literature by broadening our view of expatriation beyond the corporate context, focusing mainly on the experiences of religious expatriates. Specifically, the study examines the relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptation (i.e., psychological and sociocultural adaptation) among religious expatriates. The study draws from the theory of intelligence (Sternberg, 1999) and builds on

recent empirical findings (e.g., Guomundsdottir, 2015) in asserting that cultural intelligence as a form of intelligence can enable a religious expatriate to psychologically and socioculturally adapt in his or her new cultural environment. Cultural intelligence, defined as the capability of an individual to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity (Earley and Ang, 2003), is found to be an enabler for global leaders and global managers (e.g., Elenkov and Manev, 2009; Ng, Van Dyne and Ang, 2009). However, there is still a gap in the literature on how cultural intelligence can be relevant for individuals working in non-corporate contexts such as in religious expatriation. The study further investigates the role of intrinsic motivation in bringing about psychological and sociocultural adaptation among religious expatriates. Drawing from the theory of self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 2000; 1991) it is posited that intrinsic motivation, as a type of motivation, moderates the relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptation (both psychological and sociocultural). Intrinsic motivation - the sense of fulfilment and enjoyment that drives an individual towards the achievement of goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000) - is argued to strengthen the relationship between cultural intelligence and psychological/sociocultural adaptation. Intrinsic motivation is viewed in this study as a driving force for religious expatriates, making them determined despite the challenges they encounter while working in another cultural context. The argument is consistent with earlier findings (e.g., Smither and Walker, 2015) suggesting the relevance of intrinsic motivation for people living and working in religious communities.

By testing these relationships, the study aims to make several contributions. First, by specifically examining religious expatriation, this study addresses prior calls in the literature (e.g., McNulty and Brewster, 2017) to broaden expatriate research beyond the corporate domain to investigate an important sector of the non-corporate expatriate domain. Second, this study aims to demonstrate that while intercultural skills are important, intrinsic

motivation is equally important in ensuring both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Previous studies have shown the link between motivation and CQ (e.g., Holtbrugge and Engelhard, 2015; Schreuders-van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2016). However, the interaction between CQ and motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, has not been investigated. Doing so can advance our collective understanding as to how such interaction can yield positive outcomes (e.g., adaptation), particularly for religious expatriates. Lastly, this study offers a number of practical insights relevant to human resource (HR) strategies that can be implemented by non-religious entities, as well as other international organizations (e.g., non-profit, humanitarian), in their continued search for effective expatriation strategies.

Theoretical background and research hypothesis

Adaptation and cultural intelligence among expatriates

Adaptation is defined as the “changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands” (Berry, 1997, p. 13). Previous studies have emphasized the importance of adaptation among expatriates (e.g., Firth et al., 2014; Ren et al., 2014; Takeuchi, 2010; Farh et al., 2010). These studies assert the significance of an expatriate’s general ability to adjust (to the demands of the new cultural environment) as impacting their ability to effectively perform in their roles. Despite the significant contribution of these studies, gaps in the literature remain about the particular types of adaptation needed by expatriates for them to effectively perform in their roles and how such adaptations relate to individual-level capabilities.

In this study, the focus is on two types of adaptation: psychological and sociocultural. Psychological adaptation refers to the achievement of a sense of identity, mental health and overall life satisfaction, while sociocultural adaptation refers to coping with day-to-day requirements at school, work and society in general (Ward and Kennedy, 1999; Ward and

Rana-Deuba, 1999; Ward and Searle, 1991). These two types of adaptation are argued to relate to the intercultural capability of an expatriate. Such argument draws from the theory of intelligence (Sternberg, 1999), which asserts that intelligence enables individuals to be effective in an environment because of the skills and capabilities they possess. In the context of expatriation, and particularly religious expatriation, cultural intelligence as a form of overall intelligence is argued to be related to religious expatriates' psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

Cultural intelligence is conceptualized as an individual-level capability that enables a person to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity (Earley and Ang, 2003). Cultural intelligence is composed of mental as well as behavioral capabilities allowing individuals to function effectively despite the presence of cultural diversity. A recent conceptualization of cultural intelligence has asserted components that include cultural knowledge, cultural skills and cultural metacognition (Thomas et al., 2015).

Cultural intelligence has been found to relate to general forms of adaptation among expatriates (e.g., Ang et al., 2007; Ward and Fischer, 2008). Recently, Presbitero (2016) found that cultural intelligence is related to psychological and sociocultural adaptation among international students. Adaptation, both psychological and sociocultural, when achieved can lead to effective and successful sojourns (Smith and Khawaya, 2011; Brisset et al., 2010; Chiu, Wu, Zhuang and Hsu, 2009). Hence, it is argued that psychological and sociocultural adaptation are critical not only for international students but also for religious expatriates. When religious expatriates have high levels of cultural intelligence (i.e., they have a thorough understanding of the cultural context and have behavioral flexibility to adjust to the new cultural norms), then psychological and sociocultural adaptation can be expected to be high. Hence, this study posits that:

H1: Cultural intelligence is positively related to (a) psychological and (b) sociocultural adaptation of religious expatriates.

Intrinsic motivation as a moderator

This study further asserts that there are other individual-level factors aside from cultural intelligence that can contribute to the achievement of adaptation, both psychological and sociocultural. Specifically, the motivation of religious expatriates can be an important factor leading to higher levels of adaptation. Motivation has been shown as an integral component of expatriate performance (Varma, Pichler and Toh, 2011). One type of motivation that has attracted the attention of many researchers is intrinsic motivation, or the sense of fulfilment and enjoyment that drives an individual towards the achievement of goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In a 40-year meta-analysis of intrinsic motivation, Cerasoli, Nicklin and Ford (2014) found that intrinsic motivation is closely linked to performance. Their study emphasized that intrinsic motivation is an important determinant of adaptive performance such that a high level of intrinsic motivation leads to a high level of performance effectiveness. This finding is consistent with earlier findings by Kumar, Rose and Subramaniam (2008) that intrinsic motivation increases the likelihood of developing CQ. However, what remains unclear in these studies is the interaction between intrinsic motivation and intercultural capability (such as cultural intelligence) in influencing forms of adaptations among expatriates.

Drawing from self-determination theory, this study examines intrinsic motivation and the role that it plays in the relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptation, both psychological and sociocultural. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 1991) views humans as proactive beings whose natural or intrinsic functioning can be facilitated through the process of internalization. The process of internalization enables an individual to regulate

oneself, allowing him or her to pursue and stay engaged in the desired goals and objectives, despite any challenges they may face.

Intrinsic motivation can be argued to be present among religious expatriates. Oberholster, Clarke, Bendixen and Dastoor (2013) highlighted religious expatriates' intrinsic motivation via altruism, which is generated predominately by an individual's sense of personal purpose and meaning motivating him or her to do work outside the comforts of their home. Intrinsic motivation among religious expatriates is enhanced by the core values of their congregations (Emanuele and Simmons, 2002), such that intrinsic motivation increases to the extent that the congregation puts an increased emphasis on the psychic rewards of doing religious work. When intrinsic motivation interacts with cultural intelligence, adaptation (both psychological and sociocultural) can be expected. Intrinsic motivation also triggers autonomous motivation, which according to Deci and Ryan (2008) is based on how people identify with an activity's value. When an activity is seen to be of importance, it can be integrated into the sense of self which enables an individual to engage easily in an activity, which in turn leads to greater adjustment and adaptation. Hence, this study posits:

H2: Intrinsic motivation moderates the relationship between cultural intelligence and (a) psychological adaptation and (b) sociocultural adaptation.

Figure 1 below illustrates the conceptual framework for our study. Initially, the relationship between cultural intelligence and (a) psychological, and (b) sociocultural, adaptation are examined. Next, the moderating role of intrinsic motivation in the relationship between cultural intelligence and (a) psychological, and (b) sociocultural, adaptation are determined.

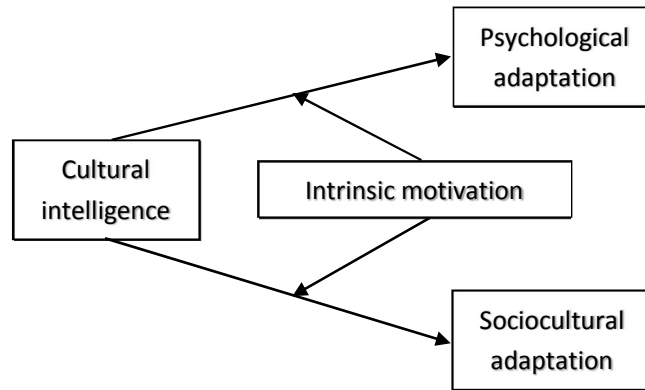


Figure 1. The moderating role of intrinsic motivation in influencing the relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptation (both psychological and sociocultural)

Method

Participants and procedures

To test the hypotheses presented in this study, religious communities were approached and invited to take part. After explaining the aims of the study and its focus on religious expatriates (i.e., those who have been assigned to another country to do religious work on a temporary basis), an online survey questionnaire was created. The format recommended for an online survey questionnaire (i.e., Sue & Ritter, 2012) was followed, which included an introduction explaining the aims of the study and details on the voluntary nature of participation. In addition, information about confidentiality was explained.

After administering the online survey for one month, with frequent reminders, a total of 133 online surveys were returned. Surveys with more than 25% missing values were removed, yielding a total of 110 useable surveys. Demographic characteristics of the respondents show that the majority were male (85%), above 40 years of age (73%), and currently residing in the US (45%), Asia (33%), Europe (15%), and Australia (7%). Length of experience as a religious expatriate showed that more than half (53%) had 10 to 20 years

experience, one quarter (27%) had more than 20 years experience, with one-tenth (10%) equally having 5 to 10 years and less than 5 years experience respectively.

Measures

All measures used in this study had a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Cultural intelligence was measured using a scale adapted from Thomas et al. (2015). Ten items were used: "I know the ways in which cultures around the world are different"; "I can give examples of cultural differences from my personal experience, reading and so on"; "I enjoy talking with people from different cultures", "I have the ability to accurately understand the feelings of people from other cultures", "I sometimes try to understand people from another culture by imagining how something looks from their perspective", "I can change my behavior to suit different cultural situations and people", "I accept delays without becoming upset when in different cultural situations and with culturally different people", "I am aware of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with someone from another culture", "I think a lot about the influence that culture has on my behavior and that of others who are culturally different" and "I am aware that I need to plan my course of action when in different cultural situations and with culturally different people". Cronbach alpha was .83.

Intrinsic motivation was measured using a scale adapted from Haines, Saba and Choquette (2008). Five items were used and modified slightly to fit the context of the study. Items included: "I have a high interest in discovering another culture"; "I am highly motivated to meet the challenges of living in a new environment"; "I would grab any opportunities to travel", "I am determined to meet new job challenges overseas" and "I would pursue any opportunities to be assigned in a foreign country". Cronbach alpha was .79.

Psychological adaptation was measured using a scale adapted from Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) and Rosenberg (1965). Five items were used and modified slightly

to fit the context of the study. Items included: "In most ways my life overseas is close to my ideal"; "The conditions of my life abroad are excellent"; "So far I have gotten the important things I want in a life overseas", "If I could change my life over, I would change almost nothing" and "I am satisfied with my life abroad". Cronbach alpha was .76.

Sociocultural adaptation was measured using a scale adapted from Ward and Kennedy (1994). Five items were used and modified slightly to fit the context of the study. Items included: "I can make myself easily understood in a new cultural environment"; "I can adapt to local customs and practices easily"; "I can adjust easily to the pace of life in a new cultural environment", "I can communicate easily with local people" and "I am comfortable interacting with others despite cultural differences". Cronbach alpha was .80. Control variables were obtained such as age, gender and number of years working as a religious expatriate.

Given the slight modifications made in some of the measures and the limited number of items used, tests of validity and reliability were conducted. Results show that the *a priori* loadings of items are above the acceptable minimum threshold of 0.50 ($p < .05^*$), demonstrating convergent validity. In addition, results indicate discriminant validity as evidenced by the low-cross-loadings of items as well as the average variance extracted (AVE) ranging from 0.76 to 0.79. The values of the Cronbach alphas (as seen above) and the Dillon-Goldstein p values are also above the acceptable value of 0.70, demonstrating support for the validity and reliability of items used in the study.

Results

Common method bias analysis

A survey wave technique (Rogelberg and Stanton, 2007) was conducted to determine potential differences between early and late survey respondents. Results demonstrated that

there was no significant difference, ensuring reliability of data collected. As data were collected from one source (i.e., religious expatriates) the presence of common method biases were determined using Harman's single factor test (Harman, 1976; Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Lee, 2003). Results show that no single factor emerges, and that no single factor accounted for more than 50% of the variance in all of the items. A correlation matrix also was developed to assess the zero-order correlation coefficients of the constructs and the marker variable following the recommendations of Lindell and Whitney (2001). Results show that the marker variable had correlation coefficients close to zero relative to other variables. Based on these results, common method bias was not shown to be a major issue in the data set.

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations and scale reliabilities

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and scale reliabilities are presented in Table 1. Mean scores and standard deviations are as follows: cultural intelligence (3.66 and 0.45, respectively); intrinsic motivation (4.12 and 0.65, respectively); psychological adaptation (4.01 and 0.34, respectively) and sociocultural adaptation (3.98 and 0.53, respectively). The results demonstrate positive correlations among the study variables. Moreover, the results show scale reliabilities.

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Insert Table 1 here

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Confirmatory factor analyses

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were conducted to determine the distinctiveness of the study variables. CFAs were conducted using AMOS IBM version 22. Three models were developed and the following indices were inspected: comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker

Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

First, a four-factor model was tested with cultural intelligence, intrinsic motivation, psychological adaptation, and sociocultural adaptation, each loading into a single factor. Results demonstrated good fit between data and the model (CFI=0.94; TLI=0.93; RMSEA=0.066; SRMR=0.68). Second, a three-factor model was tested with cultural intelligence, intrinsic motivation, and adaptation (combining both psychological and sociocultural adaptation). Results also yielded a good fit but not as good as the four-factor model (CFI=0.90; TLI=0.91; RMSEA=0.70; SRMR=0.72). Third, a two-factor model was tested combining both cultural intelligence and intrinsic motivation and both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Results demonstrated a relatively poor fit (CFI=0.81; TLI=0.83; RMSEA=0.79; SRMR=0.80). Lastly, a one-factor model was tested combining all the factors into a single factor. Results yielded the poorest fit (CFI=0.75; TLI=0.70; RMSEA=0.83; SRMR=0.85). The four-factor model provided the best fit.

Moderation analyses

To test for moderation, the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991) were followed. First, demographic variables were entered (i.e., age, gender, years of experience as religious expatriate) in the regression equation. Second, cultural intelligence was entered to predict both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Third, intrinsic motivation was entered to predict both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Lastly, a multiplicative, centered term was determined and entered to test for interaction between cultural intelligence and intrinsic motivation in influencing both psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

Results show that cultural intelligence is positively related to psychological and sociocultural adaptation, demonstrating support for H1. Furthermore, the cross-product term explained the incremental criterion variance on both psychological adaptation (12%) and

sociocultural adaptation (10%), demonstrating the moderating role of intrinsic motivation on the relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptation. Results show support for H2. See Table 2 for details.

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Insert Table 2 here

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As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), the conventional approach to plotting simple slopes was applied to enable the interpretation of the interactive effects of one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator. Figure 2a shows that intrinsic motivation strengthens the relationship between cultural intelligence and psychological adaptation. Similarly, Figure 2b shows that intrinsic motivation strengthens the relationship between cultural intelligence and sociocultural adaptation.

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Insert Figure 2a and 2b here

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Discussion

This study provides insights relevant in advancing the expatriate literature. First, this study build on previous studies (e.g., Oberholster and Doss, 2017; Oberholster et al., 2013; Navara and James, 2002) that go beyond corporate expatriation by specifically examining religious expatriation. Religious expatriation is characterized by movement to another country on a temporary basis which is fundamentally motivated by the commitment of religious communities to evangelize and spread their mission to other countries (Oberholster and Doss, 2017; Oberholster et al., 2013). Religious expatriation has been prevalent for many years, however, more research is needed to uncover these unique expatriates' experiences and the

personal characteristics of individuals engaging in expatriation in this sector. The study contributes to the literature by exposing the individual-level attributes of religious expatriates and how such attributes can lead to psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

Second, this study further contributes to the literature by demonstrating that individual-level capabilities such as cultural intelligence are important for psychological and sociocultural adaptation among religious expatriates. However, aside from intercultural skills, intrinsic motivation is found to be equally important. Specifically, cultural intelligence interacts with intrinsic motivation in bringing about high levels of psychological and sociocultural adaptation among religious expatriates, offering new insights that, while the development of intercultural skills is important among religious expatriates, their level of intrinsic motivation also matters in relation to their adaptation to a new cultural environment. This can inform corporate entities as well as other forms of organizations (i.e., not-for-profit) that they should not only focus on the development of intercultural skills (i.e., cultural intelligence) but should also leverage the intrinsic motivation of their expatriates.

Lastly, this study offers practical insights that can assist corporate entities and other types of organizations in ensuring that their expatriates can adapt both psychologically and socioculturally in their new cultural environments. Training programs, which have been demonstrated in the literature to be relevant for expatriates' adjustment (e.g., Mendenhall and Stahl, 2000; Bennett, Aston and Colquhoun, 2000), should be comprehensive and cover all aspects of cultural intelligence development. In other words, training programs should not be limited to only equipping expatriates with cultural knowledge (i.e., knowledge of cultural norms, practices and traditions), but also how to develop the ability to adapt to these cultural norms and practices. In addition, training programs need to instill expatriates with higher levels of cultural metacognition to enable them to have higher-order thinking capabilities. These skills will enable them to adjust their cultural schemas depending on the cultural

environment they are in. It is also important to have HR mechanisms that assess the motivation for expatriation. Mechanisms such as setting up one-on-one discussions and meetings with future expatriates can help clarify what drives an individual to engage in expatriation. If intrinsic motivation is found to be the main driver for expatriation, organizations can be assured that the likelihood for psychological and sociocultural adaptation would be higher.

This study is not without limitations, which also provide avenues for future research. First, this study focused on religious expatriation but to further generalize the results more research is needed among expatriates in other sectors where intrinsic motivation is exhibited, e.g., among expatriate academics (i.e., scholars and professors) and art expatriates (i.e., actors and photographers). Doing so would determine whether the same pattern of results could be expected. Second, while the study focused on intrinsic motivation, other types of motivation could be examined including integrated motivation or the motivation which transpires when regulations are fully congruent with other individual values and beliefs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). These could be examined as potential moderators that influence the relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptation. Third, this study did not examine other factors that could have contributed to psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Future studies would do well to consider factors such as family support and family cultural capital and how these factors contribute to the achievement of both psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Lastly, related to the present methodology, while common method bias was not found to be a major issue in the study, future investigations could use the full scales to measure psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Furthermore, future research might obtain data from other people such as the expatriate's peers or community members to reliably ascertain and validate an individual's assessment of his or her psychological and sociocultural adaptation in a new cultural environment.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics (Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations and scale reliabilities)

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----------------------------|------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 Cultural intelligence | 3.66 | .45 | (.83) | | | |
| 2 Intrinsic motivation | 4.12 | .65 | .54** | (.79) | | |
| 3 Psychological adaptation | 4.01 | .34 | .40* | .60* | (.76) | |
| 4 Sociocultural adaptation | 3.98 | .53 | .43* | .38* | .53* | (.80) |

N=110; Reliabilities are shown along the diagonal in parentheses.

**Significant at $p < 0.01$; *Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 2. Moderation analyses results

| Variables | Psychological adaptation β | | | | Sociocultural adaptation β | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|------|------|-------|----------------------------------|------|------|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Step 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Age | .00 | | | | .01 | | | |
| Gender | .02 | | | | .00 | | | |
| Years of experience | .03 | | | | .02 | | | |
| Step 2 | | | | | | | | |
| Culture intelligence | | .25* | | | | .22* | | |
| Step 3 | | | | | | | | |
| Intrinsic motivation | | | .33* | | | | .30* | |
| Step 4 | | | | | | | | |
| CQ X IM | | | | .45** | | | | .40** |
| R^2 | .20 | .30 | .42 | | .19 | .27 | .37 | |
| ΔR^2 | .20 | .28 | .40 | | .17 | .24 | .34 | |

Note: N=110; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Figure 2a. The moderating influence of intrinsic motivation on the relationship between cultural intelligence and psychological adaptation

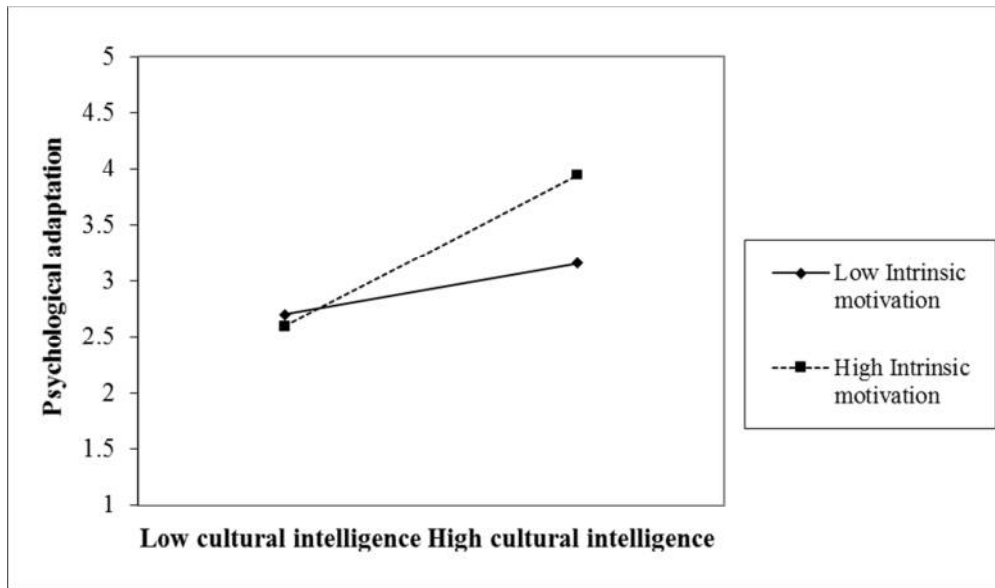


Figure 2b. The moderating influence of intrinsic motivation on the relationship between cultural intelligence and sociocultural adaptation

