

# The Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Processes of Psychological Adaptation of Personality to a New Sociocultural Environment

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## Abstract

The article examines the role of emotional intelligence in the processes of psychological adaptation to a new sociocultural environment, drawing on contemporary empirical and theoretical research in cross-cultural psychology, social neuroscience, and the psychology of well-being. The study integrates evidence on demographic, emotional, neural, and institutional factors of adaptation, emphasizing the multi-stage and mediated nature of the influence of emotional intelligence on individual psychological functioning. It is shown that emotional intelligence does not operate as a direct determinant of well-being or behavioral outcomes but exerts its effects through processes of psychological and cross-cultural adaptation, which function as a central transformational mechanism. Particular attention is given to the role of cross-cultural competence as a key mediator, as well as to the neural foundations of social adaptation associated with systems of self-reflection and cognitive control. The analysis demonstrates that successful adaptation mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and eudaimonic well-being, professional performance, and long-term life decisions, including the intention to remain in the host country. It is also shown that stress under conditions of sociocultural change may act both as a risk factor and as a source of psychological growth when sufficient emotional-cognitive resources are present. The article may be useful for researchers and practitioners studying psychological adaptation, emotional intelligence, and processes of individual integration in contexts of cultural mobility.

## Keywords

Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Adaptation, Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Cross-Cultural Competence, Neural Foundations, Psychological

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## 1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, the intensification of international mobility, and the expansion of transnational forms of education and employment, the psychological adaptation of individuals to a new sociocultural environment has become one of the key issues in contemporary psychology (Kornas-Biela et al., 2023). Entry into a different cultural, linguistic, and social reality is accompanied not only by objective changes in living conditions but also by a profound restructuring of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms that ensure psychological functioning.

Contemporary research indicates that psychological adaptation cannot be reduced to the alleviation of distress or the short-term overcoming of culture shock. Rather, it represents a complex and dynamic process involving emotional well-being, social inclusion, self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and the individual's capacity to maintain functional effectiveness under conditions of prolonged sociocultural stress (Rudnák et al., 2022). Within this perspective, explanatory models relying predominantly on demographic or situational variables demonstrate limited explanatory power and fail to capture the internal psychological mechanisms underlying successful adaptation.

Scientific evidence increasingly suggests that emotional intelligence influences psychological adaptation predominantly indirectly, through mechanisms such as emotional regulation, the formation of emotional social support, the reduction of perceived stress, and the development of competencies enabling effective intercultural interaction. In this context, it is essential to conceptually distinguish between cross-cultural competence and psychological adaptation, as these constructs operate at different functional levels within the adaptation process.

In the framework of the present study, cross-cultural competence is defined as a system of acquired cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills that enable effective interaction with representatives of a different cultural environment. This competence includes the ability to interpret culturally specific social cues, regulate emotional responses in intercultural communication, and select contextually appropriate behavioral strategies. It represents an operational capacity realized primarily in social interaction rather than an overall indicator of psychological functioning.

Psychological adaptation, by contrast, is conceptualized as a broader and integrative process reflecting the individual's overall psychological functioning and subjective sense of well-being in a new sociocultural environment. It encompasses emotional stability, perceived social inclusion, self-regulatory capacity, and the ability to maintain functionality under conditions of sustained sociocultural uncertainty. From this perspective, cross-cultural competence is not treated as an

outcome of adaptation, but as a functional mechanism through which emotional and cognitive resources are translated into successful psychological adaptation.

Within this conceptual framework, emotional intelligence should not be regarded as an autonomous predictor of well-being or behavioral outcomes. Instead, it functions as an internal psychological resource that facilitates the development of cross-cultural competence and supports effective emotional regulation in intercultural contexts. Psychological adaptation, in turn, acts as the central transformational process linking emotional intelligence with such outcomes as psychological well-being, professional performance, and sustainable life decisions in a new sociocultural environment.

Given this theoretical gap, there is a need for a conceptual analysis of emotional intelligence not as a direct determinant of well-being, but as a resource embedded within a multi-stage process of psychological adaptation to a new sociocultural environment. The aim of the present study is the theoretical substantiation of emotional intelligence as a key psychological resource ensuring successful psychological adaptation under conditions of sociocultural change. To achieve this goal, the study integrates contemporary empirical and theoretical research to identify mediating mechanisms of emotional intelligence, systematize adaptation processes, and clarify the role of psychological adaptation in shaping well-being and behavioral outcomes.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the conceptualization of emotional intelligence as an adaptation resource operating indirectly through a cascade of emotional, cognitive, and social mechanisms centered on psychological adaptation. The research hypothesis postulates that successful psychological adaptation in a new sociocultural environment is determined not by demographic characteristics or external conditions per se, but by the level of emotional intelligence development, which mediates emotional regulation, social interaction, and the cognitive processing of cultural experience.

The scope of the study covers processes of psychological adaptation under conditions of educational, professional, and social mobility, with particular emphasis on emotionally and culturally demanding situations characterized by uncertainty, intercultural interaction, and the necessity for prolonged self-regulation.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The present study is of a review-analytical nature and is based on a systematic analysis of scientific publications devoted to the processes of psychological adaptation of the individual in a new sociocultural environment and the role of emotional intelligence in these processes. Literature search and selection were conducted using the Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar databases. The search covered peer-reviewed publications published between 2021 and 2025 and was performed using combinations of the following keywords: emotional intelligence, psychological adaptation, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural competence, well-being, and intercultural adjustment.

Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) empirical or review studies published in peer-reviewed international journals; (2) direct relevance to psychological adaptation in a new sociocultural environment; (3) explicit examination of emotional intelligence, cultural or cross-cultural intelligence, or related emotional-cognitive resources; and (4) the use of validated psychometric instruments or formal analytical models. Exclusion criteria included conceptual papers without empirical grounding, studies focused exclusively on clinical populations, and publications not available in English.

The final selection prioritized studies that explicitly modeled mediating mechanisms between emotional intelligence, cross-cultural competence, and psychological adaptation, which formed the empirical basis for the theoretical framework of the present analysis.

Methodologically, the empirical studies included in the analysis rely primarily on cross-sectional quantitative designs using structural equation modeling. In the works of [Liao et al. \(2021\)](#), [Liu et al. \(2025\)](#), and [Rudnák et al. \(2022\)](#), SEM and PLS-SEM methods were applied to assess direct and mediated links between emotional or cultural intelligence, cross-cultural competence, psychological adaptation, and behavioral or professional outcomes. The use of these methods allowed for the identification of mediating mechanisms through which individual emotional-cognitive resources are transformed into adaptive results.

A separate methodological block of the study is represented by the neurobiological approach to the analysis of adaptation. In the pilot study by [Kokubun et al. \(2025\)](#), magnetic resonance imaging and quantitative analysis of brain gray matter volume were used to identify neural correlates of cross-cultural adaptation. This approach allows psychological adaptation to be viewed as a multi-level process involving neural, cognitive, and emotional components, rather than merely behavioral manifestations.

To assess psychological adaptation, distress, and well-being, a number of works employed standardized psychometric scales. In the study by [Al Abiky \(2021\)](#), the psychosocial adaptation of international students was measured as an integral indicator of academic, social, and emotional inclusion. In the work of [Kornas-Biela et al. \(2023\)](#), psychological distress was operationalized as a latent construct including stress, anxiety, and depressive manifestations. Eudaimonic psychological well-being and its structural components were analyzed in the study by [Lomberg and Jordaan \(2024\)](#), while the role of perceived stress as a key mediator between stressors and well-being was demonstrated by [Slimmen et al. \(2022\)](#).

The theoretical framework of the research relies on modern models of acculturation and individual factors of adaptation, in which psychological adaptation is interpreted as the result of the interaction of personality, emotional, motivational, and contextual variables. This approach is systematized in the review work by [Kosic \(2025\)](#) and is used in the present study to integrate empirical data of varying methodological nature into a unified explanatory model.

The analytical focus of the study is directed toward identifying the mediating

mechanisms through which emotional intelligence influences the psychological adaptation of the individual. Emotional social support, cross-cultural competence, cognitive and emotional regulation, and processes of sociocultural experience interpretation are considered as key mechanisms of this kind.

### 3. Theoretical Analysis

The analysis of demographic predictors of psychological adaptation focuses on assessing the explanatory potential of basic socio-demographic variables in a new sociocultural environment. Attention is centered on the question of the extent to which age and gender act as independent factors of adaptation, or whether they reflect the operation of deeper psychological mechanisms not directly captured by demographic indicators.

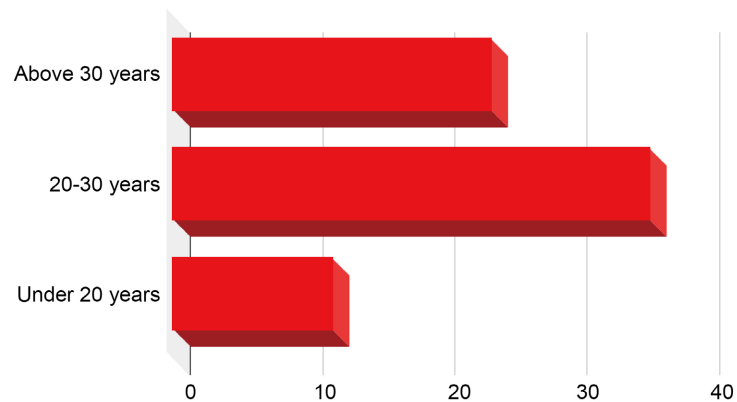
In the study by [Al Abiky \(2021\)](#), age was identified as a statistically significant predictor of psychosocial adaptation among international students, with a one-way analysis of variance showing that age differences explain approximately 25% of the variation in the integral adaptation indicator. Younger students demonstrated consistently lower indicators of psychological comfort, social inclusion, and general acceptance of the new environment. This result indicates the presence of systematic differences in adaptive capabilities between age groups, but in itself does not reveal the psychological mechanism of the identified effect.

From the perspective of the present study, age is interpreted as an indirect indicator of accumulated individual-psychological resources formed during the process of life experience. This interpretation aligns with the theoretical model of acculturation, in which adaptation is viewed as the result of the interaction of personality, emotional, and cognitive factors, rather than as a function of demographic characteristics ([Kosic, 2025](#)). Within this approach, age reflects the degree of formation of emotional regulation, tolerance for uncertainty, and the capacity for cognitive processing of culturally new experiences.

The absence of statistically significant gender differences in the level of psychosocial adaptation, recorded in the study by [Liu et al. \(2025\)](#), further confirms the limitations of demographic explanations. Similar results were obtained in the study by [Lomberg and Jordaan \(2024\)](#), where gender did not act as a significant predictor of psychological well-being when controlling for the level of adaptation. This indicates that gender per se does not determine the success of the adaptation process without accounting for individual psychological resources.

Additional empirical evidence suggests that demographic variables lose explanatory power when psychological mediators are included in models. Thus, in the study by [Kornas-Biela et al. \(2023\)](#), demographic indicators did not enter the final structural model of distress, whereas emotional intelligence and emotional social support played a key role. Similarly, in the work of [Ye and Dong \(2021\)](#), characteristics such as gender and education level did not exert a significant influence on psychological adaptation, while cross-cultural adaptation acted as the central psychological mechanism. **Figure 1** examines the distribution of psychosocial ad-

aptation indicators by age groups, illustrating the identified differences between younger and more mature participants in the sample.



**Figure 1.** Psychosocial adjustment by age groups among Middle Eastern students studying at U.S. universities (compiled by the author based on source Al Abiky, 2021).

The data presented in **Figure 1** demonstrate a clearly pronounced age differentiation of psychosocial adaptation indicators. The lowest average value of the integral adaptation indicator is recorded in students under 20 years of age, amounting to 49.04 points out of a maximum possible value of 80, which indicates pronounced difficulties in psychological and social embedding into the new educational and cultural environment. In the group of students aged 20 to 30 years, the average level of psychosocial adaptation is significantly higher, reaching 57.64 points, which reflects a higher level of psychological comfort, social inclusion, and acceptance of host environment conditions. The highest adaptation indicators are observed in students over 30 years of age, for whom the average value is 60.23 points, testifying to the greatest resilience to cultural stress and more effective regulation of adaptation processes. The sequential growth of psychosocial adaptation indicator values with increasing age reflects not random differences between groups, but a stable regularity indicating the systematic strengthening of the individual's adaptive potential as life and social experience accumulate.

Empirical evidence suggests that the influence of emotional intelligence on psychological adaptation in a new sociocultural environment is multi-stage in nature and is realized through a system of mediating mechanisms. **Table 1** presents key empirical links between emotional intelligence, cross-cultural competence, and psychological adaptation, obtained within the framework of a structural model analyzing direct and mediated effects of individual psychological resources on adaptive and professional outcomes in an intercultural context.

It should be noted that the standardized coefficients ( $\beta$  values) presented in **Table 1** are not the result of original statistical or regression analyses conducted within the present study. Rather, these coefficients are directly derived from previously published structural equation models reported in the referenced empirical studies, primarily Liao et al. (2021) and Kokubun et al. (2025).

**Table 1.** Structural paths linking emotional intelligence, cross-cultural competence, and adjustment (Compiled by the author based on sources: Kokubun et al., 2025; Liao et al., 2021).

Path / Relationship	$\beta$	Significance	Interpretation
EI → Cultural Adaptability	0.734	$p < 0.001$	EI as driver of behavioral flexibility
EI → Cross-cultural Competence	0.470	$p < 0.001$	EI fosters intercultural skills
EI → Cross-cultural Adjustment	0.477	$p < 0.001$	Direct psychological adaptation effect
Cultural Adaptability → Adjustment	0.082	$p < 0.001$	Adaptability alone is insufficient
Cultural Adaptability → Competence	0.268	$p < 0.001$	Competence as transformation mechanism
Competence → Adjustment	0.252	$p < 0.01$	Core mediator of adaptation
Adjustment → Performance	0.502	$p < 0.001$	Adaptation as predictor of effectiveness

The purpose of presenting these coefficients is illustrative and comparative: they are used to demonstrate the relative strength and direction of empirically established relationships between emotional intelligence, cross-cultural competence, and psychological adaptation within the context of the reviewed literature. Accordingly, Table 1 represents a conceptual synthesis of existing empirical findings rather than newly estimated statistical parameters.

The results presented in Table demonstrate that emotional intelligence exerts a statistically significant direct influence on cross-cultural adjustment, which indicates its independent role in ensuring the psychological functioning of the individual in a new cultural environment. This effect reflects the individual's ability to effectively regulate emotional reactions, interpret social signals, and maintain adaptive behavior under conditions of cultural uncertainty, which is consistent with broader models of psychological adaptation focused on internal regulatory resources (Kosic, 2025).

At the same time, the obtained data indicate the fundamentally important role of cross-cultural competence as a central mediator of the adaptation process. The absence of a direct influence of cultural adaptability on psychological adaptation, alongside the simultaneous presence of a significant mediated effect through cross-cultural competence, indicates that behavioral flexibility in itself does not lead to successful adaptation without the formation of stable communicative and interpersonal skills (Lomberg & Jordaan, 2024). This conclusion aligns with the results of studies showing that adaptive outcomes are determined not by potential readiness for change, but by the ability to effectively realize it in actual social interaction.

Additional confirmation of the cascading nature of adaptation is found in data on the link between psychological adaptation and professional performance. In

the study by [Liao et al. \(2021\)](#), it is the level of adaptation, rather than emotional intelligence or adaptability directly, that acts as a significant predictor of the performance of specialists working abroad. A similar logic is traced in studies where psychological adaptation is viewed as a key condition for the formation of sustainable behavioral and motivational outcomes in an intercultural environment ([Slimmen et al., 2022](#)). Thus, adaptation is fixed as a functional link connecting individual psychological resources with activity results.

The results are consistent with data obtained in studies of emotional intelligence and distress, where it is shown that the individual's emotional resources reduce negative psychological consequences not directly, but through socially mediated mechanisms such as emotional support and the quality of interpersonal relationships ([Rudnák et al., 2022](#)). Similarly, in the linguistic context, the influence of cultural intelligence on linguistic confidence is realized exclusively through adaptation and communicative competence, emphasizing the universality of the cascade model of adaptation.

Thus, in the aggregate of the presented data, emotional intelligence acts as the initial individual-psychological resource; however, its contribution to psychological adaptation and professional performance is realized through a system of intermediate mechanisms, central among which is cross-cultural competence and the associated process of psychological adaptation of the individual to the new sociocultural environment.

#### 4. Discussion

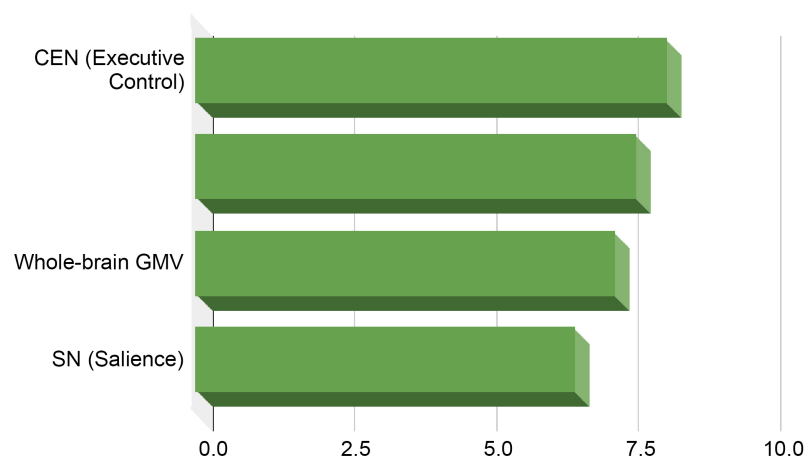
Consideration of the neural foundations of psychological adaptation allows for a transition from describing behavioral and subjective manifestations of adaptation processes to analyzing their underlying biological mechanisms. This transition is of fundamental importance for interpreting emotional intelligence as a psychological construct and resource relying on a specific neural organization.

According to data from [Kokubun et al. \(2025\)](#), the closest links with adaptation indicators in a new sociocultural environment are found not for all its components, but primarily for the indicator reflecting the success of social interaction with representatives of the host culture. It is this aspect of adaptation that proved most sensitive to variations in gray matter volume in key functional brain networks. This allows social interaction in an intercultural environment to be interpreted as the most resource-intensive and psychologically complex component of the adaptation process.

Of particular importance in this context is the brain network associated with self-reflection and the understanding of the mental states of others. Reinforced connections of this network with indicators of social adaptation indicate that successful inclusion into a new cultural environment requires developed mechanisms for conceptualizing one's own experience, interpreting the intentions of others, and flexibly restructuring perceptions of social norms ([Lomberg & Jordaan, 2024](#)). Consequently, these functions are viewed as the neural basis of empathy and emo-

tional awareness, which constitute the core of emotional intelligence.

Significant is the contribution of the network ensuring voluntary control of behavior and the purposeful regulation of cognitive processes. The connection of this network with indicators of social adaptation is interpreted as a reflection of the need for constant control of one's own reactions, suppression of impulsive responses, and selection of socially adequate behavioral strategies under conditions of cultural uncertainty. In this aspect, neural data confirm that emotional intelligence includes the ability to understand emotions and the ability to manage them in complex social situations. **Figure 2** examines the relationship between key functional brain networks and indicators of social adaptation.



**Figure 2.** Functional brain networks and indicators of social adaptation in an intercultural environment (Compiled by the author based on source: Kokubun et al., 2025).

The connections presented in **Figure 2** demonstrate a pronounced differentiation of neural correlates of social adaptation in an intercultural environment. The highest correlation strength was identified for the network ensuring voluntary cognitive control and behavior regulation ( $r = 0.826$ ), indicating the key role of mechanisms for conscious management of reactions and suppression of impulsive responses in the process of social interaction in a new cultural environment. A slightly less pronounced, but also high correlation was recorded for the network associated with self-reflection and the understanding of the mental states of others ( $r = 0.771$ ), reflecting the significance of empathy and the interpretation of social signals for successful adaptation. The volume of gray matter in the whole brain demonstrates a comparable link with social adaptation indicators ( $r = 0.733$ ), indicating the role of general neural resources in ensuring the individual's adaptive potential. The lowest, but statistically significant link was found for the network responsible for attention redistribution and the isolation of significant stimuli ( $r = 0.663$ ), testifying to its auxiliary role in relation to systems of cognitive control and social understanding. The totality of these data allows emotional intelligence to be interpreted as the functional result of the coordinated operation of several neural systems, ensuring both the understanding of social context and the regula-

tion of behavior under conditions of sociocultural uncertainty.

At the same time, caution is warranted in interpreting the neurobiological findings discussed above. The proposed links between functional brain networks and indicators of social adaptation are based predominantly on a single pilot neuroimaging study with a small and culturally specific sample of Japanese expatriates (Kokubun et al., 2025).

As such, these results should not be construed as universal neural mechanisms underlying psychological adaptation across sociocultural contexts. Rather, they should be viewed as exploratory evidence illustrating potential neural correlates of adaptation-related processes, such as self-reflection and cognitive control. Future research employing longitudinal designs, larger samples, and cross-cultural comparisons is necessary to establish the robustness and generalizability of these neural associations.

Neurobiological data reinforce the argument that emotional intelligence should be interpreted not as a set of social skills, but as an integrative adaptation resource ensuring the individual's resilience under conditions of sociocultural uncertainty. The neural organization of adaptation identified in the study by Rudnák et al. (2022) allows psychological and biological levels of analysis to be linked within a unified model, in which emotional, cognitive, and social processes form a functionally integral system ensuring the successful psychological adaptation of the individual to a new sociocultural environment.

Consequently, the key problem in interpreting the role of emotional intelligence lies not in assessing its direct influence on psychological well-being, but in understanding the mechanisms through which this influence is realized. Empirical data show that emotional intelligence does not function as an autonomous source of resilience, but is integrated into the adaptation process, modifying methods of emotional and social processing of stressful experiences.

The fact of the mediated action of emotional intelligence becomes particularly evident when analyzing eudaimonic aspects of well-being. In the study by Lomborg and Jordaan (2024), it is shown that such dimensions of well-being as self-acceptance, positive relations, and purpose in life depend most on the success of adaptation to the new social environment, while the contribution of emotional intelligence loses independent explanatory power when the level of adaptation is accounted for.

Adaptation in this context acts not as an intermediate state, but as a mechanism for transforming internal resources into sustainable life strategies. This conclusion receives empirical confirmation in the analysis of behavioral outcomes. In the study by Rudnák et al. (2022), it was established that the intention to remain in the host country is determined exclusively by the level of intercultural adaptation and does not depend directly on perceived organizational support or institutional conditions. This means that life decisions related to migration and the professional future are formed based on the subjective experience of inclusion and functionality in the social environment, rather than under the influence of formal fac-

tors.

Of particular note is the interpretation of the role of stress in this model. In the study by [Slimmen et al. \(2022\)](#), it is shown that perceived stress exerts a strong negative influence on psychological well-being; however, this effect is not fatal and is determined by the nature of the subjective processing of stressors. This result is complemented by data from [Ye and Dong \(2021\)](#), where stress in the process of cross-cultural adaptation is viewed as a functional element triggering learning processes and personal growth given the presence of adequate psychological resources.

Thus, emotional intelligence should be viewed not as a direct source of well-being or sustainable life decisions, but as a resource increasing the probability of successful adaptation to a new sociocultural environment. It is adaptation that determines whether stressful experience transforms into a factor of disorganization or, conversely, becomes the basis for psychological growth, eudaimonic well-being, and the individual's long-term life choices.

## 5. Limitations

A key limitation of the present review is that the proposed cascade model is grounded primarily in cross-sectional studies, which restricts causal inference. Consequently, the relationships between emotional intelligence, cross-cultural competence, and psychological adaptation should be interpreted as associative rather than strictly causal. Although the reviewed studies employ advanced statistical modeling, including mediation analyses, the dynamic and potentially reciprocal nature of adaptation processes requires confirmation through longitudinal and experimental research designs.

## 6. Conclusion

Emotional intelligence should be viewed as a basic adaptation resource that increases the individual's resilience under conditions of cultural uncertainty but does not guarantee well-being in itself. Its contribution is realized not in a direct line, but through a sequence of psychological transformations, centered on the process of psychological adaptation.

The key mechanism translating emotional resources into actual adaptation results is cross-cultural competence: it is this competence that turns behavioral flexibility and emotional awareness into effective social interaction and sustainable inclusion in the host environment. Therefore, adaptation is not a background, but a functional node through which emotional and cognitive resources are transformed into quality of life and performance effectiveness.

Stress during a change of sociocultural context performs a dual role: given a deficit of emotional-cognitive resources, it intensifies maladaptation, while given their sufficiency, it becomes a factor of development and the restructuring of life strategies. Final life decisions in a new country are formed primarily on the basis of the subjective experience of successful inclusion and manageability of one's

own life, rather than from external conditions as such. The conclusions obtained expand contemporary concepts of psychological adaptation, demonstrating that the individual's resilience under conditions of sociocultural uncertainty is determined not by the presence of isolated personality traits, but by the coherence of emotional, cognitive, and social mechanisms integrated into the adaptation process.

Thus, the most productive approach to understanding adaptation lies in the cascade model: emotional intelligence sets the potential for self-regulation and social understanding, cross-cultural competence ensures its realization in interaction, and psychological adaptation acts as the final mechanism determining the resilience, well-being, and long-term life trajectory of the individual.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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