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The intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children

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Chapter 4

Hypotheses and Theoretical Model

- 4.1 The theoretical model**
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- 4.3 Expatriate family characteristics**
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Chapter 3 has introduced ideas, models, and previous studies related to the adaptation and adjustment of expatriate spouses and children. Having pointed out that expatriate spouses' and children's adaptation is highly related to the success of the international business assignments, we believe that it is important to understand and learn more about the issue. Therefore, the present study is focused on determinants of intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children. We concentrated on three major determinants, namely the expatriate spouses' and children's personality characteristics, family characteristics, and finally the expatriates' work characteristics.

This chapter concentrates on the hypotheses that we developed. All of these hypotheses are derived from related theories and discussions of previous studies about intercultural adaptation, family, and expatriates. This chapter starts with an introduction of the theoretical model of the present study, and it is followed by a discussion of the model's components.

4.1 Theoretical Model

The theoretical model forwarded in the present study (Figure 4.1) is an adaptation of the Expatriate's Family Adjustment Model proposed by Caligiuri, Hyland, and Joshi (1998) and of the Intercultural Adjustment Model suggested by Parker and McEvoy (1993). The present study's model consists of four main components:

- a. Personality characteristics of expatriate spouses and children,
- b. Expatriate family characteristics, i.e. family cohesion, family adaptability, and family communication characteristics,
- c. Expatriates' work life characteristics (support given by the international companies to expatriate spouses and children, and expatriates' work satisfaction)
- d. The intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children, which is assumed to be the outcome of a, b, and c.

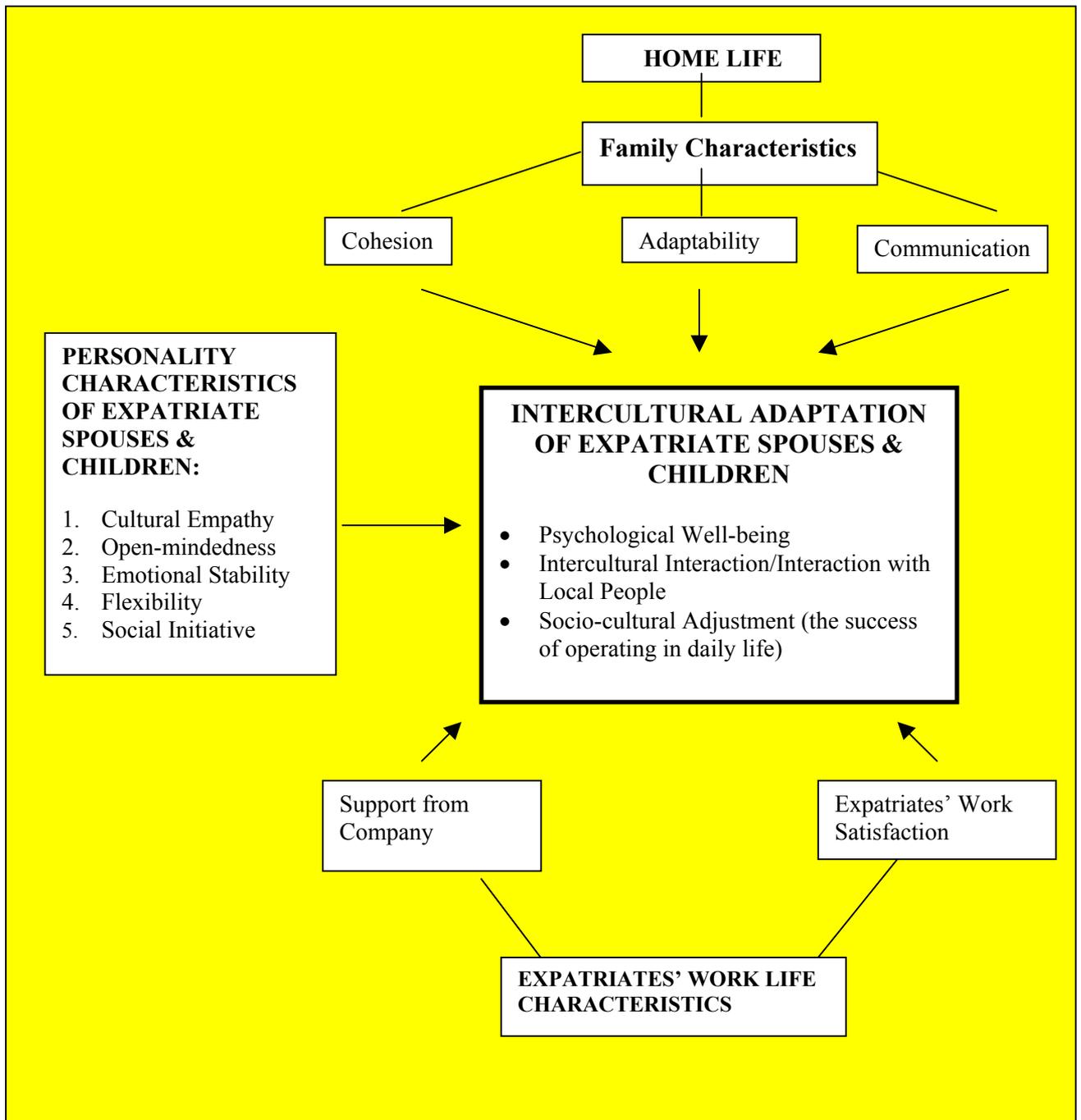
The following sections of this chapter discuss all the components that are believed to be determinants of intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses and children and how the hypotheses were formulated. The sections will start with the personality characteristics of expatriate spouses and children. Then we bring Family Theory into discussion to obtain more depth in the issues surrounding home life of the expatriate family. Two main aspects related to expatriates' work life characteristics are highlighted: expatriate work satisfaction while working in the host country and support received by the spouses and children from the international companies before and during the expatriation period.

4.2 Personality characteristics of expatriate spouses and children

The first major part of the present research concerns personality characteristics of expatriate spouses and children. The assumption is that a number of intercultural traits are related to successful adaptation of expatriate spouses and children: Cultural Empathy, Open-mindedness, Emotional Stability, Flexibility and Social Initiative (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001).

The first dimension is Cultural Empathy. Cultural Empathy, also referred to as "sensitivity" (e.g., Hawes & Kealy, 1981), is probably the most frequently mentioned dimension of multicultural effectiveness (Arthur & Bennet, 1995; Cleveland, Mangone, & Adams, 1960; Ruben, 1976). Ruben (1976) defined it as "the capacity to clearly project an interest in others, as well as to obtain and to reflect a reasonably complete

Figure 4.1
A Proposed Model of Intercultural Adaptation of Expatriate Spouses and Children



Sources: Expatriate's Family Adjustment Model proposed by Caligiuri, Hyland, and Joshi (1998) and Intercultural Adjustment Model suggested by Parker and McEvoy (1993).

and accurate sense of another's thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences". In other words, this dimension refers to the ability to empathize with the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of members of different cultural groups (Mol et al., 2001), in particular the local people. It can be argued that expatriate spouses and children should have some interest in the culture and behaviour of the local people and at the same time the former group should try to understand and accept the differences. We therefore predict that the quality of this dimension among expatriate spouses and children is positively related to their intercultural adaptation.

Open-mindedness is defined as an open and unprejudiced attitude towards different groups and towards different cultures norms and values. Arthur and Bennet (1995) classify open-mindedness among the relational skills and use items as non-judgmentalness and racial/ethnic tolerance to measure this dimension. In addition, Harris (1973) found "interest in the local people" as one of the predictors of success. Finally, Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman (1978) and Ronen (1989) mentioned "freedom from prejudice" as an important attitude associated with multicultural effectiveness.

The third dimension is Emotional Stability, which is defined as the tendency to remain calm in stressful situations versus a tendency to show strong emotional reactions under stressful circumstances. This dimension is less often referred to in the literature in relation to multicultural effectiveness. Tung (1981) identified emotional stability as an important dimension for overseas success across different functions. Hammer et al. (1978) mentioned ability to deal with psychological stress as an essential dimension of intercultural effectiveness. In addition, in a study by Abe and Weisman (1983) and in a review by Church (1982), the ability to deal with stress indeed appeared to be a crucial dimension.

Flexibility is the fourth dimension, and it can be defined as "a tendency and ability to adjust one's behavioral strategies to different or more restricted circumstances within a foreign culture versus the inability to do so and a tendency to stick to familiar behavioral strategies". Several scholars have stressed the importance of this dimension (Arthur & Bennet, 1995; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Hanvey, 1976; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Smith, 1966; Torbion, 1982). Expatriate spouses and children need to be flexible in the host country, particularly when their expectations do not match or are totally different from what they find in the host country. Elements of flexibility, such as the ability to learn from mistakes and adjustment of behaviour, are associated with the ability to learn from new experiences. This ability to learn from new experiences

appears to be of critical importance to multicultural effectiveness (Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahoney, 1997).

The final dimension is Social Initiative, which is defined as “a tendency to stand out in a different culture, to establish contact and to be active ” (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). The expatriate children, as well as expatriate spouses, will also have to develop new skills in the host country (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Several researchers have pointed at the relevance of the ability to establish and maintain contacts (Hawes & Kealy, 1981; Kets de Vries & Mead, 1991). For instance, Hawes and Kealy (1981) stressed the importance of interaction with people from the host country and the importance of making friends among the locals. More convincingly, empirical evidence underlines the relevance of this dimension (Abe & Weisman, 1983; Hammer et al., 1978). Hammer et al. (1978) asked cross-culturally effective students to assess the importance of a large number of dimensions. Communication skills and the ability to establish interpersonal relationships appeared as dimensions that are crucial to multicultural effectiveness.

Initial studies have supported the concurrent and predictive validity of these dimensions against indicators of multicultural success (e.g., Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001). Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) provided preliminary support for its incremental validity in predicting international orientation. In a study among international students in Taiwan it was shown that higher scores are associated with a higher sense of psychological and social well-being in an intercultural context (Mol, Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2001; see also Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2001). The five intercultural traits have never been studied in relation to the adaptation of expatriate spouses. Nevertheless, there was no reason to assume that traits that are related to the ability to establish contacts within a new culture, to maintain a high level of psychological well-being, and to perform successfully among expatriates differ from traits that determine successful adaptation among expatriate spouses in a host country. Therefore, the prediction was that the five traits would be positively related to intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses, as a result of which the following hypothesis can be formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Cultural Empathy, Open-mindedness, Emotional Stability, Flexibility and Social Initiative are positively related to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children.

4.3 Expatriate Family

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1984, p. 394), a family refers to any group of people related by blood or marriage, especially a group of two grown-ups and their children. From a socio-psychological perspective, a family is a small group composed of at least two members who have perceptions of their shared situations (Bowen, 1991).

Hill (1971, p. 12) stated that a family is a social system because it has the following characteristics:

- Family members occupy various positions which are in a state of interdependence, that is, a change in the behavior of one member leads to a change in the behavior of other members;
- The family is a relatively closed, boundary-maintaining unit;
- The family is an adaptive organization; and
- The family is a task-performing unit that meets both the requirements of external agencies in the society, and the internal needs and demands of its members.

The family characteristics discussed by Hill (1971) have clear implications for the expatriate family members' situation. International relocation can put a lot of pressure on the family members and a lack of well-being of one family member will affect the entire family. In addition, role changes among the family members as a result of expatriation are likely to affect the entire family. Living in the host country may create positive or negative outcomes, i.e., a stronger bond among the family members or vice versa. In order to "survive" and live to the fullest in the host country, an expatriate family will try to adapt and seek ways to adjust to the living in the host country. This could be hard especially during the culture shock period and the expatriate family members have to cope to the new situation. The family that succeeded may create a stronger bond among the family members. However, one of the major changes in resources affecting relocated families to a foreign country is the loss of support from friends and other family members in the home country (Dussert, 1994). Expatriate children may see international relocation as frightening experiences because of losing friends and have to start their life a new every time they are relocated. A study by Dussert (1994) showed that expatriate spouses experienced temporary loss of their husbands who had often been sent on business trips right after relocation. Finally, Hill regards the family as a task-performing unit that meets both the requirements of external agencies in the society, and the internal needs and demands of its members. With

respect to the former, while only the husbands/wives are formally employed by the company, expatriate spouses probably have to attend social gatherings and also to participate in social functions in the host country. Both spouses, especially the wives are expected to respond to its formal and informal demands (see Papanek, 1973).

4.3.1 Family Characteristics

Caligiuri et al. (1998) constructed a theoretical model of expatriate family adjustment and employment adjustment, which is derived from the Family System Theory (e.g., Hill, 1949; McCubbin, 1988; Minuchin, 1974), Double ABCX Theory (Hill, 1949; McCubbin & Patterson, 1982), and Spillover Theory (e.g., Aldous, 1969; Crouter, 1984; Piotrkowski, 1979).

The Family System Theory (Hill, 1949; McCubbin, 1988; Minuchin, 1974), as used by Caligiuri et al. (1998) in their model describes the nature of the relationships among all family members. In terms of the Family System Theory, an overseas assignment is a change, which requires the family to restructure, develop, and adapt in response to the demands of the new situation. If families can adequately adapt to their foreign environment, then they will maintain continuity and facilitate each family member's psychological growth and cross-cultural adjustment. One individual can disrupt the balance in the relationships between family members (Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998). Departing from the Family System Theory, the present study focused on three family characteristics that may contribute to adaptation among expatriate spouses and children, namely cohesion, adaptability and communication. These three dimensions of family behaviour were derived from a conceptual clustering of over fifty concepts developed to describe marital and family dynamics (McCubbin et al., 1983, p. 47). A study by Forster (1997) showed that there were clear indications that family relationships in terms of flexibility/adaptability, cohesion, and communication played an important role in the outcomes of international assignments.

4.3.1.1 Family Cohesion

Family cohesion has been defined as the emotional bonding that family members have with one another (Olson et al., 1984, p. 60). McCubbin et al. (1983, p. 48) defined family cohesion as the degree to which an individual is separated or connected to the family system. According to Bloom (1985) cohesion denotes the emotional bonding and contact that family members have with each other. A study by De Ciere et al. (1991)

showed that the relationship of expatriate spouses with their children became closer through the expatriation period as they had endured trials and tribulations together. The level of emotional bonding within the family may impact the members' ability to develop relationships beyond the boundaries of the family unit, for example, a child's ability to form friendships with other children (Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998) and a spouse with the neighbours. In the present study, the prediction was that the amount of cohesion in the expatriate family is positively related to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children. Hypothesis 2a ensues from this prediction and it is formulated in the following way:

Hypothesis 2a: The amount of cohesion in the expatriate family is positively related to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children.

4.3.1.2 Family Adaptability

The second family characteristic concerns family adaptability. Olson et al. (1984, p. 60) defined family adaptability as the ability of a family system to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress. Put more simply, family adaptability is the extent to which a family is flexible and able to change its functioning (Olson et al., 1984, p. 48). According to Caligiuri, Hyland, and Joshi (1998), the ability of a family to adapt is critical both in response to stress from within the family and stress from the external environment. In the context of the expatriate's family, an example of sources of stress is high workloads at the new working place, which placing restrictions on the time that can be spent with the family. In addition, expatriate spouses who may have to attend more to the needs of the other family members may also feel neglected by their partners. Children may have problems adapting to the new schools or friends. These new situations may pile up the stress that the family members are facing. According to the Family System Theory, the better the family is able to change its power structure, role relationship, and relationship rules in response to such situational and developmental stress, the better the family adapts to new situations (Olson et al., 1984, p. 60). The expectation was therefore that adaptability among the expatriate family members is positively related to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children, which brings us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2b: The adaptability of expatriate family members is positively related to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children.

4.3.1.3 Family Communication

The third family characteristic is communication, which is the very tool through which families can create a shared sense of meaning, develop and orchestrate coping strategies, and maintain harmony and balance (McCubbin et al., 1996). A healthy level of family communication is evidenced by a family's ability to address and resolve the concerns within the family, a family's ability to resolve conflicts by mutual recognition of each other's opinions, and a family's ability to negotiate issues of contention (Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998). Olson et al. (1984) referred to family communication as a dimension that facilitates both family cohesion and adaptability. It has been argued that the ability to address and resolve their concerns, the ability to resolve conflicts by mutual recognition of different viewpoints within the family, and the ability to negotiate issues of contention contribute to a healthy level of family communication (Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998). In sum, the prediction of the present study was that the quality of communication among the expatriate family members is positively related to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children, which expressed in a hypothesis reads as follows:

Hypothesis 2c: The quality of communication among the expatriate family members is positively related to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children.

4.4 The Impact of Expatriates' Work Life on the Intercultural Adaptation of the Spouses and Children

Finally, the present study focused on the relation between the expatriates' work life and expatriate spouses and children's intercultural adaptation. Two aspects of expatriates' work life were considered: expatriates' work satisfaction and the support that expatriate spouses and children receive from the international company prior and during the expatriation period.

4.4.1 "Home Life" vs. "Work Life"

Work-family conflict represents various ways in which the intersection between jobs and family life is a source of difficulty for workers and family members (Hughes et al., 1992). Work-family conflict occurs "when the demands of work and family roles are incompatible in some respect so that participation in either the work or family role is more

difficult because of participation in the other role” (Voydanoff, 1988, p. 749). Role overload occurs when there are too many demands accumulating from all roles at any one time making satisfactory performance of the roles are unlikely achievable (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Work-family conflict can be explained by using spillover theory. Spillover Theory is regarded as the most strongly recognized theory for examining work-family dynamics (Lambert, 1990) and the theory has also been applied to describe the relationship between the “home life” of the expatriate family members and “work life” of the expatriates (e.g., Aldous, 1969; Crouter, 1984; Piotrowski, 1979). Following Caligiuri, Hyland, and Joshi (1998), the present study uses Spillover Theory to describe how the inter-cultural adaptation and adjustment of the expatriate family members can influence the expatriate’s work performance. Work-family conflict can interfere with one’s ability to perform family and parental roles (Bohn and Viveros-Long, 1981). Small and Riley (1990) found that difficulties with balancing work and family demands can influence leisure activities, home management, and parent-child relationships.

4.4.1.1 Expatriate’s Work Satisfaction

In the present study, it was examined how the expatriates’ work life characteristics in terms of work satisfaction could affect the intercultural adaptation of the expatriate spouses. Work-family conflict represents various ways in which the intersection between jobs and family life is a source of difficulty for workers and family members (Hughes et al., 1992). High quantitative, emotional and mental work demands may result in work overload, causing work-home interference (Aryee, 1992; Geurts, Rutte, & Peeters, 1999; Voydanoff, 1988; Wallace, 1999).

The draining of energy and resources at work may cause the expatriate to be exhausted when he or she comes home, leaving little energy for the demands springing from family life. In this regard, Jackson and Maslach (1982) compared husbands’ job-related affective well-being with their wives’ description of at-home behavior. They observed that the level of husbands’ job-related emotional exhaustion was significantly associated with wives reporting that their husbands came home tense, unhappy, tired and upset, and that they had difficulty sleeping at night. Finally, high level of emotional exhaustion felt by the husbands was associated with low quality of family life. With respect to

expatriate family, expatriate spouses and children may observe and feel differences in the working family member's behaviour while working in the host country. For example, an expatriate child who used to get enough attention in the home country may feel neglected if the expatriate spends a lot of time away from home while working in the host country. Expatriate children may also overhear their parents talking and expatriates will from time to time also talk about their work in the host country, enthusiastically or in negative ways to their spouses and children. In the present study it was assumed that the expatriates' work satisfaction may influence their spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation in the host country. Hence, the resulting hypothesis reads:

Hypothesis 3: Expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation is positively related to expatriates' work satisfaction in the host country.

4.4.1.2 Support received from international companies

The next issue that is related to the expatriates' work life characteristics is the support that expatriate spouses and children receive from the company prior and during the expatriation period. Social support may be defined as "an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient" (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984, p. 13). Shumaker and Brownell (1984, p. 22) argue that people in support are physically and emotionally healthier than non-supported people. Social support networks include available people and relationships that are perceived by the individual to provide resources to deal with stressful situations (Black, 1989). Social support includes friendships that are more than mere casual acquaintances, intimate relationships, and people who are willing to come forward with practical help when it is really needed (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984; Cobb, 1976). In the present study we focused on support received from the company. Help and support from the company seem seriously needed by the expatriate spouse in order to adapt and adjust effectively to the new surroundings.

A study of British expatriate spouses by Forster (1997) showed that most of them were dissatisfied with the relocation support provided by the companies. De Ciere et al. (1991) found that company assistance with the relocation was a strong predictor of psychological adjustment of an expatriate's partner to relocation, particularly in the early stages of the expatriation. Therefore in the present study, it was predicted that support received from the company is positively related to the intercultural

adaptation of expatriate spouses and children, which leads to the following formulation:

Hypothesis 4: Support received from the company is positively related to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children.

4.5 Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation

As has been discussed earlier in Chapter 3, a distinction can be made between psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990). Psychological adaptation refers to internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction. In the theoretical model (Figure 4.1), psychological adaptation is indicated by the item Psychological Well-being. Socio-cultural adaptation refers to external psychological outcomes that link individuals to their new context such as the ability to deal with daily problems, particularly in the areas of family life, work, and school (See Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999) and is indicated by item Socio-cultural Adjustment in the theoretical model (see Figure 4.1).

In the present thesis, indicators of both psychological and socio-cultural adaptation were included. In addition, intercultural interaction was added as another dimension of intercultural adaptation (Kealey & Ruben, 1983). This dimension was defined by having an interest in and being able to deal with people from other cultures and can be regarded as a sub-dimension of socio-cultural adaptation. In the theoretical model (Figure 4.1) intercultural interaction is indicated by the item Intercultural Interaction/ Interaction with Local People.

4.6 Key concept

This chapter has introduced the theoretical model and hypotheses of the present study where the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, Family Theory, Spillover Theory and other related studies were discussed. Figure 4.1 presents the theoretical model of the present research. Table 4.1 gives the key concept of this chapter.

Table 4.1
Key concept of Chapter 4

<i>Key concepts</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
The intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouse and children	By borrowing the definition of Bowen and Orthner's (1997), we define intercultural adaptation and adjustment of expatriate spouse and children as the outcome of having to cope and adjust interculturally in a host country, in responding to fulfill the individual and collective needs of the family members and at the same time responding to the needs and demands of the different culture environment in the host country.

