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The intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children

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Chapter 6

The Relationship between Expatriate Spouses' Intercultural Adaptation and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions based on Respondents Who Have Lived in The Netherlands

- 6.1 Introduction**
- 6.2 Method**
- 6.3 Results**
- 6.4 Discussions and Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is to see whether the intercultural adaptation model presented in Chapter 4 holds across cultures. This exploratory study seeks to investigate the relationships between Hofstede's four cultural dimensions and intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses who have lived in the Netherlands. The chapter starts with a discussion of Hofstede's four cultural dimensions. Next, procedures and results of the present study are presented, and this chapter ends with a section of further discussion and conclusion.

6.1 Introduction

Up till this point, we have presented a model on intercultural adaptation suggesting that it is universal, i.e., that the model holds regardless of the characteristics of the expatriates' and the host country's culture. It is quite likely that this assumption does not hold. Imagine a Malaysian family that moves to the Netherlands on an international business assignment and compare this family with a British family who also moves to the Netherlands for the same reason. Are both families facing the same difficulties adapting to the Netherlands? Are their multicultural traits or issues related to family adjustment equally critical to their adaptation success stories?

Most people do not realize that a society's culture is not universal until they come into contact with people from a different culture (Triandis, 1995) and the realization is inescapable when one has to live in a different culture. Cultural distance between the sojourners and host country affects the degree of difficulty or ease with which the sojourners adapt to the host country (Tung, 1981; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; De Verthelyi, 1995; Tarafodi & Smith, 2001). In this regard, De Verthelyi (1995, p. 388) argued that characteristics of the host society, such as its degree of receptivity or pressure to conform, and its tolerance of cultural diversity will have an important impact on the amount of acculturative stress that sojourners will experience.

In this chapter, we will examine whether the role of personality characteristics, family characteristics, and expatriates' work characteristics in intercultural adaptation differs across cultures. The impact of expatriate spouses' cultural background in terms of Hofstede's four cultural dimensions on the importance of each of the model variables will be examined.

Let us recall Hofstede's four cultural dimensions. Based on his research on corporate culture conducted among 116,000 IBM employees in 50 countries, Hofstede proposed four cultural dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity vs. Femininity (Hofstede, 1991). These four cultural dimensions seem to hold both for organizations and nations. First, *Power Distance* is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions (basic elements of society like the family, school, and the community) and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1991, p. 28). The second dimension is Individualism vs. Collectivism. *Individualism* pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. *Collectivism* as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange

for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1991, p. 51). *Uncertainty Avoidance* is the third dimension, which is defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. This feeling is, among other things, expressed through nervous stress and in a need for predictability: a need for written and unwritten rules (Hofstede, 1991, p. 113). The fourth dimension is Masculinity vs. Femininity. *Masculinity* pertains to societies, in which social gender roles are clearly distinct (i.e., men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focussed on material success whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life). *Femininity* pertains to societies in which social gender roles overlap (i.e., both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life) (Hofstede, 1991, pp. 82).

Tung (1981) and Ward and Kennedy (1994) argue that the larger the cultural difference between the home country and the host country, the more difficult it seems to identify with members from the host country. This implies that expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation will be particularly difficult if expatriate spouses relocate to a host country that scores opposite on each of the cultural dimension. In terms of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the Netherlands which is characterized as a small Power Distance culture is considered a highly Individualistic country, it belongs to the strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures, and it is a Feminine country. Therefore, we expect that expatriate spouses from countries representing the opposite position in each of the cultural dimensions face more difficulties in adapting to the Netherlands compared to their cultural counterparts.

Hypothesis 1 : Expatriate spouses from countries representing the opposite position in each of Hofstede's cultural dimensions face more difficulties in adapting to the Netherlands compared to their cultural counterparts.

In addition, we assumed that some determinants of intercultural adaptation are more important for expatriate spouses from some cultures than for those from other cultures. First, we assumed that personality characteristics in general are more important among expatriate spouses from Individualistic countries. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), people from Individualistic cultures define themselves as unique and separate from the social context compared to those from Collectivistic cultures who primarily define themselves in terms of the way they belong to, fit in, and are connected to the social context.

Hypothesis 2 : Personality characteristics in general are more important among expatriate spouses from Individualistic countries in order to adapt effectively to the Netherlands.

In addition where the level of specific dimensions is concerned, we expect that Social Initiative is more important for expatriate spouses from the Collectivistic and large Power Distance cultures in order to adjust to the Netherlands than for expatriate spouses from Individualistic and low Power Distance cultures (see Wiersinga, 2002). Individuals from Collectivistic countries are less inclined to take initiative and to speak out their interests compared to individuals from Individualist countries. Individuals from large Power Distance cultures are less used to engaging in independent exploration compared to individuals from small Power Distance cultures (see McCrae and Costa, 1996) and therefore also need to score high on Social Initiative in order to adapt effectively to the Netherlands.

Hypothesis 3 & 4 : Social Initiative is more important among expatriate spouses from the Collectivistic and large Power Distance cultures in order to adjust to the Netherlands.

Furthermore, we also assumed that Emotional Stability is more important for expatriate spouses from weak Uncertainty Avoidance cultures compared to expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. In a high uncertainty-avoiding culture, people constantly try to minimize the possibility of unstructured situations, they are more emotional, and they are motivated by inner nervous energy. Linking his study to Lynn's country anxiety scores (1971), Hofstede (1980) found that the average score of Emotional Stability is higher among individuals from weak Uncertainty Avoidance countries compared to individuals from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. Furthermore, since individuals from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures are less flexible to changes, we would argue that the Flexibility dimension is important for expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures in order to adapt to the Netherlands successfully.

Hypothesis 5 : Emotional Stability is more important for expatriate spouses from weak Uncertainty Avoidance cultures compared to expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures.

Hypothesis 6 : Flexibility dimension is more important for expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures in order to adapt to the Netherlands successfully.

In addition, we expect family characteristics to be more important to the adaptation of expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures since family values are highly appreciated in the Collectivistic cultures.

Hypothesis 7 : Family characteristics are more important to the adaptation of expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures compared to Individualistic cultures.

Individualistic cultures are strongly associated with having challenging work to do where they can achieve a personal sense of accomplishment (Hofstede, 1991). Hofstede also mentioned that individuals from Masculine cultures are associated most strongly with the opportunity for high earnings, getting the recognition when a good job is done, having an opportunity for advancement to higher-level jobs, and having challenging work to do where they can get a personal sense of accomplishment. Hence, we expected Expatriates' Work Satisfaction to be more important among expatriate spouses from Individualistic and Masculine cultures compared to expatriate spouses from Collectivistic and Feminine cultures.

Hypothesis 8 & 9 : Expatriates' Work Satisfaction is more important among expatriate spouses from Individualistic and Masculine cultures compared to expatriate spouses from Collectivistic and Feminine cultures.

6.2 Method

6.2.1 Procedure

The respondents from the present study who have lived in the Netherlands were divided according to Hofstede's Index (1991) by referring to their home countries. For the four cultural dimensions, Hofstede has computed index values for each country included in his research. For example, in the Power Distance group, the index values range from 11 (the lowest) to 104 (the highest), and in the Individualism vs. Collectivism group, the index values range from 6 (the lowest) to 91 (the highest). In the present study, we grouped countries of each dimension with indexes from 1 to 50 in the low group and countries with indexes 51 and above in the high group (see Tables 7.1, 7.3, 7.5, and 7.7). See the method section of Chapter 5 for a detailed description of the sample and the measures of the study.

First, we were interested in whether there was an effect of culture (in terms of Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity vs. Femininity) on the three indicators of intercultural adaptation, i.e., Psychological Well-being, Intercultural Interaction, and Socio-cultural Adjustment. Second, we were interested in whether the effect of personality, work, and family characteristics would differ for individuals scoring high or low on each of the cultural dimension.

6.3 Results

First, MANOVA was used to test the effect of the four cultural dimensions on the three indicators of expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation. Secondly,

correlation analysis was carried out to examine the relationships between the independent and dependent variables of the low and high scoring sub-groups on each cultural dimension. However, the results of the present study should be treated with caution due to the small sample size of the groups. In addition, the Fisher's z-test that was used to examine the differences between the correlations of the sub-groups did not yield any significant results (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). We will discuss the results by taking the cultural dimensions one by one starting with Power Distance and ending with Masculinity vs. Femininity.

6.3.1 Power Distance

Power Distance was the first Hofstede dimension that we were interested in. Table 6.1 presents the composition of the high and low Power Distance groups of expatriate spouses who have lived in the Netherlands (regardless of the length of stay).

Table 6.1
List of the Respondents according to the Power Distance Index (PDI)

Country of origin (home country)	Number of participants	Power distance Index (PDI)
i. Large Power Distance Malaysia, Mexico, Indonesia, India, Singapore, Brazil, France, Turkey, Belgium, Spain, Japan	N = 34	From 104 to 54
ii. Small Power Distance South Africa, USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, New Zealand, Denmark, Israel, Austria	N = 159	From 50 to 13

See Hofstede (1991) for a complete PDI

The Effect of Power Distance on Intercultural Adaptation

Multivariately and univariately, no significant effect of Power Distance on the indicators of intercultural adaptation was found.

Correlations between the Variables and the Three Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation

For large and small Power Distance cultures separately, correlations between the dependent and independent variables from our model were computed. Table 6.2 presents the resulting correlations. The results, however, should be treated with caution because of the imbalance in the number of respondents in both sub-groups.

Table 6.2
Correlations between Independent Variables and the Three Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation: Large and Small Power Distance Groups

	Large Power Distance N = 34			Small Power Distance N = 159		
	Well-being	Intercultural Interaction	Socio-cultural Adjustment	Well-being	Intercultural Interaction	Socio-cultural Adjustment
1. Cultural Empathy	.35*	.32	.33	.34**	.22**	.32**
2. Open-mindedness	.42*	.36*	.30	.42**	.34**	.32**
3. Social Initiative	.41*	.32	.18	.35**	.24**	.22**
4. Emotional Stability	.57**	.12	.22	.46**	.15*	.20*
5. Flexibility	.27	.38*	.27	.17*	.17*	.14
6. Family Cohesion	.32	.08	.40*	.46**	-.01	.24**
7. Family Adaptability	.46**	.22	.46**	.45**	.09	.30**
8. Family Communication	.37*	.38*	.48**	.41**	.03	.19*
9. Support from Company	.16	-.09	.08	.21*	.14	.15
10. Expatriates' Work Satisfaction	.29	.30	.29	.38**	.26**	.25**

$p^* < .05$, $p^{**} < .01$ (2-tailed)

First, we examined the correlations between the expatriate spouses' personality characteristics and the three indicators of intercultural adaptation. We expected Social Initiative to be relatively more important for expatriate spouses from large Power Distance cultures. Correlational analysis indicated that Social Initiative was significantly correlated with the indicators of intercultural adaptation in both large and small Power Distance groups. The correlations of Social Initiative with Well-being and Intercultural Interaction were indeed higher in the large Power Distance group, but the differences were relatively small. Interestingly, the correlations between Flexibility and the three indicators of adaptation in the large Power Distance group were much higher than the correlations in the small Power Distance group. The results suggest that

Flexibility may be more important among expatriate spouses from large Power Distance cultures compared to their small Power Distance counterparts.

Secondly, with respect to family and expatriates' work characteristics, we had no specific predictions. Interestingly, the level of the correlations of Family Communication with both Intercultural Interaction and Socio-cultural Adjustment in the large Power Distance were clearly higher than the correlations for the small Power Distance group. Thus, we may conclude that Family Communication is more important among expatriate spouses from large Power Distance cultures compared to small Power Distance cultures. With respect to expatriates' work characteristics, no clear differences in the correlations were found between the groups.

6.3.2 Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism vs. Collectivism was the next Hofstede dimension that we were interested in. Table 6.3 presents the characteristics of the Individualistic and Collectivistic group of expatriate spouses who have lived in the Netherlands (regardless of the length of stay).

Table 6.3
List of the Respondents according to the Individualism vs. Collectivism Index (IDV)

Country of origin (home country)	Number of participants	Individualism Index (IDV)
i. Individualist USA, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, France, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, Germany, South Africa, Austria, Israel, Spain	N = 170	From 91 to 51
ii. Collectivistic India, Japan, Brazil, Turkey, Mexico, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia	N = 23	From 48 to 14

See Hofstede (1991) for a complete IDV

The Effect of Individualism vs. Collectivism on Intercultural Adaptation

Multivariately, no significant main effect of Individualism vs. Collectivism on intercultural adaptation was found. At the univariate level, a marginally significant effect was found on Psychological Well-being, $F(1, 191) = 3.55$, $p < .05$, indicating a higher level of Psychological Well-being among spouses from Individualistic cultures ($M = 3.56$) than among spouses from Collectivistic cultures ($M = 3.22$). This finding should be treated with caution, however, because of the insignificant multivariate result.

Correlations between the Variables and the Three Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation

Next, we correlated the dependent and independent variables from our model for expatriate spouses from Individualistic and Collectivistic cultures separately. Again, the results should be considered with caution because of the imbalance in the number of respondents in both groups (see Table 6.4).

We predicted that personality is particularly important for expatriate spouses from Individualistic cultures. Indeed, the correlations between Cultural Empathy, Open-mindedness, and Emotional Stability and the three indicators of adaptation were higher in the Individualist group than in the Collectivistic group. We also assumed that Social Initiative is more important for expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures but correlational analysis did not support this prediction. Interestingly, the results for Flexibility reveal that this dimension is much more important to the psychological well-being of expatriate spouses in the Collectivistic group than in the Individualistic group. This suggests that Flexibility may be more important for expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures in order to adapt to the Netherlands effectively. Emotional Stability was significantly related to expatriate spouses' psychological well-being in both the Individualistic and Collectivistic groups.

We expected that family characteristics are more critical to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures. This prediction was only partly supported. Particularly, the strength of the correlations between the three family characteristics and Socio-cultural Adjustment was somewhat higher in the Collectivistic group than in the Individualistic group. This suggests that Socio-cultural Adjustment of expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures may be strongly influenced by their family cohesion, adaptability, and communication than Socio-cultural Adjustment of spouses from Individualistic cultures.

With respect to expatriates' work characteristics, both Support from Company and Expatriates' Work Satisfaction (as what we predicted) showed significant relationships with the indicators of intercultural adaptation among spouses from Individualistic countries whereas no or even negative relationships were found in the Collectivistic group. The results suggest that Support from Company and Expatriates' Work Satisfaction may be more important for expatriate spouses from Individualistic countries compared to expatriate spouses from Collectivistic countries.

Table 6.4
Correlations Between the Variables and the Three Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation: Individualist vs. Collectivistic groups

	Individualist N = 170			Collectivistic N = 23		
	Well-being	Inter-cultural Interaction	Socio-cultural Adjustment	Well-being	Inter-cultural Interaction	Socio-cultural Adjustment
1. Cultural Empathy	.36*	.28*	.34**	.11	.13	.17
2. Open-mindedness	.44*	.35**	.31**	.20	.27	.28
3. Social Initiative	.35*	.26**	.21*	.25	.19	.21
4. Emotional Stability	.47*	.17*	.20**	.53**	-.03	.27
5. Flexibility	.18*	.17*	.15*	.20	.39	.36
6. Family Cohesion	.47*	.00	.26**	.14	-.05	.34
7. Family Adaptability	.46*	.11	.31**	.29	.04	.38
8. Family Communication	.43*	.07	.22**	.11	.22	.37
9. Support from Company	.21*	.15*	.16*	.09	-.26	-.09
10. Expatriates' Work Satisfaction	.40*	.28*	.26*	.05	.09	.11

p* < .05, p** < .01 (2-tailed)

6.3.3 Uncertainty Avoidance

Next, we were interested in whether or not Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance dimension affects expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation.

Table 6.5

List of the Respondents according to the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

Country of origin (home country)	Number of participants	Uncertainty avoidance Index (UAI)
i. Strong Uncertainty Avoidance Belgium, Japan, France, Spain, Turkey, Mexico, Israel, Brazil, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Australia	N = 65	From 94 to 51
ii. Weak Uncertainty Avoidance Norway, South Africa, New Zealand, Indonesia, Canada, USA, India, Malaysia, Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Singapore	N = 128	From 50 to 8

See Hofstede (1991) for a complete UAI

The Effect of Uncertainty Avoidance on Intercultural Adaptation

Multivariately, no significant effect of Uncertainty Avoidance on expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation was found. Univariately, Uncertainty Avoidance showed a marginally significant effect on Intercultural Interaction, $F(1, 192) = 3.24, p < .10$, indicating a higher level of Intercultural Interaction among spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures ($M = 3.74$) than among expatriate spouses from weak Uncertainty Avoidance cultures ($M = 3.54$). This finding should be considered with caution, however, because of the insignificant multivariate result.

Correlations between the Variables and the Three Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation

Next, we examined correlations between the independent and dependent variables in both groups. Table 6.6 shows the results of correlations among the variables in the strong and weak Uncertainty Avoidance sub-groups.

Table 6.6
Correlations between the Variables and the Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation: Strong and Weak Uncertainty Avoidance groups

	Strong Uncertainty Avoidance N = 65			Weak Uncertainty Avoidance N = 129		
	Well-being	Intercultural Interaction	Socio-cultural Adjustment	Well-being	Intercultural Interaction	Socio-cultural Adjustment
1. Cultural Empathy	.34**	.24**	.33**	.37**	.21	.27*
2. Open-mindedness	.42**	.34**	.32**	.41**	.28*	.35**
3. Social Initiative	.36**	.26**	.22**	.32*	.28*	.22
4. Emotional Stability	.47**	.15*	.21**	.36**	.19	.16
5. Flexibility	.18**	.19**	.18*	.01	.09	.09
6. Family Cohesion	.34**	.02	.26**	.34**	-.17	.24
7. Family Adaptability	.45**	.10	.31**	.29*	-.14	.23
8. Family Communication	.29**	.09	.24**	.28*	-.01	.29*
9. Support from Company	.19**	.11	.14	.23	.18	.21
10. Expatriates' Work Satisfaction	.29**	.27**	.25**	.29*	.11	.16

p* < .05, p** < .01 (2-tailed)

On the whole, the strength of the correlations between Cultural Empathy, Open-mindedness, Social Initiative, and Emotional Stability and the indicators of adaptation in both strong and weak Uncertainty Avoidance groups was about the same. This suggests that Cultural Empathy, Open-mindedness, Social Initiative, and Emotional Stability are important for expatriate spouses from both strong and weak Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. We expected Flexibility to be particularly important to the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. Indeed, the results suggest that Flexibility is more important for expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures than for expatriate spouses from weak Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. We also predicted that Emotional Stability is more

important for expatriate spouses from weak Uncertainty Avoidance compared to expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. However, correlational analysis did not support this prediction.

The correlations between family characteristics and indicators of intercultural adaptation in both strong and weak Uncertainty Avoidance groups reach a comparable level. Thus, we may conclude that family characteristics are equally important for expatriate spouses from both weak and strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures in order to adapt to the Netherlands.

With regard to expatriates' work characteristics, the results suggest that Expatriates' Work Satisfaction is more important among expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures in order to adapt to the Netherlands effectively.

6.3.4 Masculinity vs. Femininity

Masculinity vs. Femininity was the final Hofstede cultural dimension that we were interested in. Table 6.7 presents a description of the sub-groups classified as masculine and feminine respectively.

Table 6.7
List of the Respondents according to the Masculinity Index (MAS)

Country of origin (Home country)	Number of respondents	Masculinity Index (MAS)
i. Masculinity Japan, Austria, Switzerland, Mexico, Ireland, Great Britain, Germany, South Africa, USA, Australia, New Zealand, India, Belgium, Canada	N = 158	From 95 to 52
ii. Femininity Malaysia, Brazil, Singapore, Israel, Indonesia, Turkey, France, Spain, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden	N = 35	From 50 to 5

See Hofstede (1991) for a complete MAS

The Effect of Masculinity vs. Femininity on Intercultural Adaptation

Multivariately and univariately, no significant effect of Masculinity vs. Femininity on intercultural adaptation was found.

Correlations between the Variables and the Three Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation

Correlations between the independent and dependent variables of both Masculine (N = 158) and Feminine (N = 35) were examined. Table 6.8 presents the results on correlations between the variables in the Masculine and Feminine groups. Again, the results should be considered with caution because of the imbalance in the number of respondents in both groups.

On the whole, the correlations between personality characteristics and adaptation in the Masculine group are about the same level or higher than in the Feminine group (consider the relationship between Cultural Empathy and Intercultural Interaction). However, Flexibility is more strongly related to both Intercultural Interaction and Socio-cultural Adjustment in the Feminine group than in the Masculine group. The results may indicate that Flexibility is more important for expatriate spouses from Feminine cultures in order to adapt to the Netherlands effectively.

With respect to family characteristics, Family Cohesion and Communications are more strongly related to indicators of intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses from Masculine cultures. No differences between both cultures are found for Family Adaptability.

With respect to expatriates' work characteristics, Support from Company in the Masculine group showed a significant relation only with Psychological Well-being and no significant relation was found in the Feminine group. We predicted that Expatriates' Work Satisfaction is particularly important for expatriate spouses from Masculine cultures. Interestingly, in both groups Expatriates' Work Satisfaction showed significant relations with all three indicators of intercultural adaptation. However, the correlations between Expatriates' Work Satisfaction and the indicators of intercultural adaptation are clearly higher in the Feminine group as compared to the Masculine group. Thus, we may conclude that Expatriates' Work Satisfaction may be more important to the adaptation of expatriate spouses from Feminine cultures than to the adaptation of spouses from Masculine cultures.

Table 6.8
Correlations between the Variables and the Three Indicators of Intercultural Adaptation: Masculinity vs. Femininity Groups

	Masculine N= 158			Feminine N = 35		
	Well-being	Inter-cultural Interaction	Socio-cultural Adjustment	Well-being	Inter-cultural Interaction	Socio-cultural Adjustment
1. Cultural Empathy	.32**	.22**	.36**	.43**	.31	.24
2. Open-mindedness	.41**	.37**	.35**	.44**	.20	.12
3. Social Initiative	.34**	.27*	.23*	.46**	.17	.18
4. Emotional Stability	.47**	.19*	.22**	.57**	-.05	.15
5. Flexibility	.14	.17*	.17*	.48**	.29	.22
6. Family Cohesion	.46**	.03	.28*	.26	-.15	.16
7. Family Adaptability	.44**	.09	.31**	.44**	.18	.35*
8. Family Communication	.42**	.06	.24**	.23	.24	.23
9. Support from Company	.22**	.14	.15	.09	-.05	.05
10. Expatriates' Work Satisfaction	.37**	.23**	.23*	.38*	.52**	.48**

p* < .05, p** < .01 (2-tailed)

6.4 Discussions and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to gain insight into the relationship between Hofstede's four cultural dimensions and intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses who have lived/stayed in the Netherlands.

First, we looked at the impact of Hofstede's four cultural dimensions on expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation. We investigated the effect of cultural background on the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses who have lived in the Netherlands. In general, we expected expatriate spouses from similar cultures in terms of the four Hofstede's dimensions to adapt more easily

to the Netherlands than expatriate spouses from different cultures. This prediction was supported by Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. Expatriate spouses from Collectivistic and low Uncertainty avoidance cultures adapted less easily to the Netherlands than expatriate spouses from Individualistic and high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. However, it must be noted that the effects were rather weak. An explanation for the results may lie in the way expatriate spouses interpreted the items of the dependent variables in the questionnaires, particularly the Socio-cultural Adjustment scale (examples of the items are “How satisfied are you with the local food, housing condition, and children’s school?”). We should take note that culture may affect people’s self-evaluations and tendency to complain. For example, some expatriate spouses from a certain cultural dimension might have complained a lot more even though their levels of intercultural adaptation to the Netherlands were high.

Table 6.9
Evaluation of Predictions of the Present Study

Predictions on expatriate spouses who have lived in the Netherlands	Supported	Not supported
1. Expatriate spouses from countries representing the opposite position in each of cultural dimensions face more difficulties in adapting to the Netherlands compared to their cultural counterparts.	Partly supported in Individualistic and in strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures.	
2. Personality characteristics are more important among expatriate spouses from Individualistic cultures.	X	
3. Social Initiative is more important for expatriate spouses from the Collectivistic cultures.		X
4. Social Initiative is more important for expatriate spouses from large Power Distance cultures.	X	
5. Emotional Stability is more important for expatriate spouses from weak Uncertainty Avoidance cultures.		X
6. Flexibility is more important for expatriate spouses from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures.	X	
7. Family characteristics are more important among expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures.	Partly supported.	
8. Expatriates’ Work Satisfaction is more important for expatriate spouses from Individualistic cultures.	X	
9. Expatriates’ Work Satisfaction is more important for expatriate spouses from Masculine cultures.		X

Secondly, correlation analysis revealed results that were quite consistent across cultures (see Table 6.9). For example, Flexibility was found to be a more important determinant of intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures and also from strong Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. We also found that personality characteristics as well as expatriates' work characteristics were more important among expatriate spouses from Individualistic cultures.

Table 6.10
Findings of the Present Study on the Importance of Determinants Needed for Expatriate Spouses for Effective Adaptation to the Netherlands according to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Independent variables	Power Distance		Individualism vs. Collectivism		Uncertainty Avoidance		Masculinity vs. Femininity	
	Large	Small	Individualism	Collectivism	Strong	Weak	Masculine	Feminine
1. Cultural Empathy			X		X	X	X	X
2. Open-mindedness			X		X	X	X	X
3. Social Initiative	X	X			X	X	X	X
4. Emotional Stability			X	X	X	X	X	X
5. Flexibility	XX	X		XX	XX	X	X	XX
6. Family Cohesion				X	X	X	X	
7. Family Adaptability				X	X	X	X	X
8. Family Communication	XX	X		X	X	X	X	
9. Support from Company			X				X	
10. Expatriates' Work Satisfaction			X		X		X	XX

General comparison between the two sub-groups: X = important, XX = more important

In addition, we also found interesting differences in the importance of determinants for expatriate spouses across cultures (see Table 6.10). With respect to personality, only the importance of Flexibility appeared to be strongly culture-dependent. The present study reveals that Flexibility is more important

among expatriate spouses from large Power Distance, Collectivistic, strong Uncertainty Avoidance, and Feminine cultures. The importance of Family Communication also seems to differ across cultures. This family characteristic appears to be more important among expatriate spouses from large Power Distance, Collectivistic, and Masculine cultures. Support from the international company is clearly needed by expatriate spouses from Individualistic and Masculine cultures. In addition, expatriates' satisfaction with their work is more important for effective adaptation among expatriate spouses from Individualistic, strong Uncertainty Avoidance, and Feminine cultures. Interestingly, expatriate spouses from Feminine cultures have a stronger need for their partners to be satisfied with their work in order for them to adapt effectively to the Netherlands than expatriate spouses from Masculine cultures. A possible explanation for the result is that in Feminine cultures it is more common for partners to share work-related problems.

Practical Implication

This exploratory study produces some interesting results. With respect to the relation between culture and expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation, we can see that for expatriate spouses from different cultures different factors determine how well they adapt to the Netherlands. For example, as predicted personality and work-related variables appeared to be more important for expatriate spouses from Individualistic cultures and we obtained some support that family characteristics are more important for expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures. This implies that for expatriate spouses from Individualistic cultures interventions may be more strongly focussed on personality traits, support from the company, and expatriates' work satisfaction whereas for expatriate spouses from Collectivistic cultures interventions may primarily focus on family characteristics.

Limitation of the present study

The results of this study should be interpreted with caution because of the imbalance in the number of samples in both high and low sub-groups of each Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which make it hard to make accurate comparisons between the two sub-groups. In addition, the Fisher's z-test that was used to examine the differences between the correlations of the sub-groups did not yield any significant results (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Nevertheless, it gives us at least some ideas of how expatriate spouses from the high and low groups of each Hofstede's cultural dimension adapt to the Netherlands. Future studies are needed with a better representation of the different cultures. Moreover, we only considered expatriation to the Netherlands. It seems

interesting to examine differences in how expatriate spouses, for example, from high Individualistic countries adapt to another high Individualistic host country as compared to how they adapt to a low Individualistic host country. However, we did not have enough power (in term of the number of respondents in the present study to do the analysis) to generate the results. Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) carried out a study to examine either Americans are more individualistic and less collective than members of other groups. Interestingly, they found that European Americans were more individualistic — valuing personal independence more — and less collectivistic — feeling duty to in-groups less — than others. However, European Americans were not more individualistic than African Americans, or Latinos, and not less collectives than Japanese or Koreans. Among Asians American, only Chinese showed large effects, being both less individualistic and more collectivistic.

