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# When can cultural intelligence be effective for expatriate cross-cultural work adjustment?—A configurational approach

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines how cultural intelligence (CQ) impacts expatriate cross-cultural work adjustment under different boundary conditions. Specifically, drawing from trait-activation theory and adopting a configurational approach, we explore how CQ dimensions are combined and configured with cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty to influence expatriate work adjustment. Applying fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), the results from a survey of 106 expatriates in the Czech Republic indicate that five configurations are effective for high work adjustment under different conditions of cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty. In addition, three configurations explain low work adjustment. These findings demonstrate that expatriate work adjustment results from the complex interplays among expatriate CQ and the boundary conditions. This research advances the conceptual understanding of cultural intelligence and elucidates the mechanisms through which CQ facilitates expatriate cross-cultural work adjustment. It provides host companies with scenarios and templates for designing specific development programs for different types of expatriates in order to facilitate their work adjustment.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Cross-cultural adjustment; cultural intelligence; cultural distance; perceived cultural novelty; fsQCA

#### 1. Introduction

Expatriate cross-cultural adjustment (CCA), defined as an expatriate's level of psychological comfort in a new culture (Black et al., 1991), has been a central topic in international human resource management (HRM) literature (Caldwell et al., 2024). This is because the success of expatriation depends on how well expatriates manage stress resulting from their

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unfamiliarity with the host country's culture (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Central to the theory development in CCA, cultural intelligence (CQ) emerges as an important driver of expatriate CCA (Ang et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2010; Ott & Michailova, 2018), which is defined as 'an individual's capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings' (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 9). CQ is a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral capabilities (Ang et al., 2007). While each of these capabilities has varying impacts on CCA (Ang et al., 2007; Guðmundsdóttir, 2015), the original conceptualization emphasizes their synergistic interaction in producing relevant outcomes (Earley & Ang, 2003; Gelfand et al., 2008).

Despite extensive research on the CQ-CCA relationship, two deficiencies exist. First, prior research has approached CQ in ways that, while valuable for addressing distinct research questions, have not fully captured its conceptual meaning and empirical relevance. Specifically, one approach models CQ as an aggregate score (e.g. the average across all dimensions, see Chew et al., 2021; Lee & Sukoco, 2010), focusing on the overall effect of CQ as a unified construct. Another approach examines the four CQ dimensions independently (e.g. Ang et al., 2007; Guðmundsdóttir, 2015) or emphasizes a specific dimension, typically motivational CQ (e.g. Chen et al., 2010; Song et al., 2023). While the aggregate approach provides insights into the average effect of CQ as a whole, and the dimensional approach investigates the distinct contributions of individual dimensions, both approaches remain limited in capturing the dynamic interplay among CQ dimensions. Schlaegel et al. (2021) partially addressed this limitation by decomposing CQ dimensions into sets of two and three, showing that these combinations offer greater explanatory power than treating dimensions independently or as a single aggregate. However, this decomposition approach primarily identifies the independent effects of specific combinations of CQ dimensions, falling short of capturing the configurational and interactive relationships among all dimensions (Gelfand et al., 2008). Furthermore, it does not account for how individual strengths and weaknesses across CQ dimensions might compensate for each other (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2023). Similar to the aggregate and dimensional approaches, the decomposition approach assumes that CQ consistently leads to positive outcomes, overlooking nuanced and potentially negative relationships (Brand et al., 2023; Chua & Ng, 2017).

Second, existing research tends to overlook the boundary conditions of CQ (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018; Stoermer et al., 2021), missing the opportunity to deepen understanding of the mechanisms through which CQ influences CCA. While two studies (i.e. Chen et al., 2010; Song et al., 2023) have explored how cultural distance, defined as the extent to which the home and host country cultures are different from each other (Shenkar, 2001), moderates the CQ-CCA linkage, these studies have exclusively focused on motivational CQ. This narrow focus leaves unexplored how all four CQ dimensions interact with cultural distance to explain positive and negative outcomes. Additionally, previous research has neglected perceived cultural novelty as an important boundary condition (e.g. Jenkins & Mockaitis, 2010; Stoermer et al., 2022), which is an expatriate's perceptual assessment of cultural similarities and differences between the home and host country (Ren et al., 2014). Specifically, previous research acknowledges that objective cultural differences (i.e. cultural distance) and subjective cultural differences (i.e. perceived cultural novelty) have differential effects on expatriates (Ren et al., 2014). However, their interplays with CQ dimensions in explaining expatriate CCA remain unexplored.

Addressing the identified knowledge gaps, this research takes an exploratory stance to investigate how combinations of CQ capabilities under the conditions of cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty influence cross-cultural work adjustment. Following prior research, we intentionally focus on cross-cultural work adjustment as it is arguably the most important aspect of CCA (Chen et al., 2010; Davies et al., 2019). Defined as the extent to which expatriates feel psychologically comfortable working in a foreign culture, cross-cultural work adjustment is directly linked to job performance and the achievements of expatriation objectives (Black et al., 1991). Its importance extends to higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Chen et al., 2010; Lee & Sukoco, 2010), which reduce the likelihood of premature return and support the continuity of international operations (Black et al., 1991).

We draw on trait-activation theory (TAT) (Tett et al., 2021; Tett & Burnett, 2003), following Chen et al. (2010) and Stoermer et al. (2021), and adopt a configurational approach (Fiss, 2011; Meyer et al., 1993; Misangyi et al., 2017), to explore the intricate and dynamic interplays among CQ dimensions, cultural distance, and perceived cultural novelty and their impact on work adjustment. Originally developed to explain how situational cues prompt the utilization of personality traits, TAT has been extended to explain how abilities, such as CQ, are either facilitated or constrained by diverse situations (Chen et al., 2010; Stoermer et al., 2021). According to TAT, CQ is activated and expressed in response to relevant situational cues, such as the cultural distance (Black et al., 1991) or perceptions of significant cultural differences (Ren et al., 2014), which in turn facilitate or constrain CCA. To complement TAT as a substantive theory, we employ the configurational approach, which provides an exploratory lens to examine how multiple antecedents jointly produce an outcome and how different combinations of antecedents can lead to the same outcome (Fiss, 2007, 2011; Misangyi et al., 2017). This approach acknowledges that these antecedents may exert differential and even opposing effects, depending on how they interplay within a configuration (Fainshmidt et al., 2020; Fiss, 2007, 2011; Misangyi et al., 2017). By integrating TAT with the configurational approach, we explore how combinations of CQ capabilities, activated by cultural distance, perceived cultural novelty, or their combined influence, lead to high or low work adjustment.

This research makes several contributions to the literature. First, it enriches the CO-CCA literature by adopting a configurational approach to show how different configurations of CQ dimensions can lead to both high and low cross-cultural work adjustment. By emphasizing the dynamic interdependencies among CQ dimensions, our findings demonstrate how weaknesses in certain dimensions can be counterbalanced by strengths in others. This offers a nuanced perspective on CQ's role in expatriate CCA. Our approach extends and complements aggregate, dimensional, and decomposition approaches by uncovering pathways and conditional relationships that prior research often overlooks. Second, this study responds to recent calls (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018; Schlaegel et al., 2021) for more exploratory research on the boundary conditions of CQ. By examining how perceived cultural novelty and cultural distance jointly influence the CQ-CCA relationship, we provide new insights into how objective and subjective cultural differences interact to either facilitate or constrain CQ's effects on work adjustment. In doing so, this approach broadens the existing literature, which has largely emphasized the moderating role of cultural distance on motivational CQ. Third, our research challenges the assumption that CQ always leads to positive outcomes by specifying the boundary conditions under which CQ capabilities may lead to poor work adjustment. In doing so, it contributes to a more balanced understanding of CQ's role in expatriate adjustment, aligning with recent calls to critically evaluate its contextual effectiveness (Brand et al., 2023; Gelfand et al., 2008; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018). Finally, our methodological contribution lies in employing a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) method to complement traditional variable-based methods and unpack the CQ-CCA link. Unlike regression-based approaches, fsQCA highlights the complex interdependencies among CQ dimensions and boundary conditions, uncovering configurations that lead to diverse outcomes. This aligns with recent calls for the adoption of fsQCA in international business (IB) (Fainshmidt et al., 2020) and international HRM research (Fan et al., 2021). The managerial implications of our findings offer insights into practices aimed at enhancing expatriate work adjustment, such as recruitment, pre-departure training and on-the-job development.

#### 2. Conceptual background

#### 2.1. CCA and CQ: a configurational approach

CQ was originally conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of three dimensions: cognition (including metacognition), motivation, and behavior (Earley & Ang, 2003). Cognitive CQ refers to an individual's knowledge about cultural differences, motivation CQ concerns about one's ability to direct attention and energy toward functioning in culturally novel situations, whilst behavioral CO captures a capability to demonstrate culturally appropriate behavior. Metacognitive CQ was later added as a stand-alone dimension that reflects an individual's mental capability to acquire, process, and understand cultural knowledge (Ang et al., 2007). CQ has been widely utilized as a key construct for understanding expatriate effectiveness, global leadership, and intercultural competence (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Schlaegel et al., 2021). However, its conceptualization and measurement have faced criticism. Some scholars question whether CQ has identifiable observable exemplars and whether successful intercultural interactions should necessarily be free from conflicts (Blasco et al., 2012). Others have raised concerns about its measurement, particularly the reliance on self-reports and whether they adequately capture cultural adaptability (e.g., Jackson, 2022).

Despite these critiques, CQ has been widely adopted in IB (e.g. Schlaegel et al., 2021; Stoermer et al., 2021) and international HRM literature (e.g. Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Song et al., 2023). However, its operationalization has been inconsistent. Two predominant approaches exist in CQ-CCA research. The first approach aggregates the four dimensions into a singular CO construct, demonstrating that higher overall CO is linked to better adjustment (Chew et al., 2021; Lee & Sukoco, 2010). However, this approach does not differentiate the unique contributions of each CQ dimension to CCA, leaving uncertainties about whether these dimensions have equal impacts (Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018). In contrast, the second approach considers the role of each CQ capability independently in predicting CCA. Among the four dimensions, motivational CQ consistently predicts positive CCA outcomes (Han et al., 2022; Ott & Michailova, 2018). However, findings for other CQ dimensions are mixed and sometimes contradictory. For example, behavioral CO has been found to positively relate to CCA (Ang et al., 2007), negatively relate (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015), or have no effect (Akhal & Liu, 2019). Although the dimensional approach compensates for the limitations of the aggregate approach, it assumes that CQ dimensions operate independently and does not fully capture how their interactions might influence CCA.

Inconsistent conceptualizations pose challenges for theory development, as findings may lack comparability and risk being misleading. To address this inconsistency, Rockstuhl and Van Dyne (2018) proposed a bi-factor framework of CQ, which models both the general (i.e. overall CQ) and specific (i.e. CQ dimensions) constructs. This framework allows researchers to simultaneously examine the shared effect of all CQ dimensions and the differential effects of the four dimensions. However, this model overlooks how CQ dimensions may be combined to explain work-related outcomes (Schlaegel et al., 2021). Schlaegel et al. (2021) partially addressed this gap by decomposing the four dimensions into ten sets of two and three, revealing mutual reinforcement among them. For example, behavioral CQ, when combined with metacognitive and motivational CQ, plays a more substantial role in predicting outcomes than when considered independently. However, this decomposition approach has three limitations: (1) it emphasizes the relative importance of each combination of CQ dimensions, treating them as competing explanations for variation in CCA; (2) it fails to demonstrate compensatory effects among individuals' CQ strengths and weaknesses (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2023; Van Dyne et al., 2012); and (3) it overlooks potential negative effects of CQ on CCA (Brand et al., 2023; Gelfand et al., 2008). We argue that a configurational approach is better suited to address these limitations.

First, the configurational approach supports conjunctural causation, allowing multiple interdependent conditions to simultaneously contribute to a causal combination that leads to the outcome of interest (Fainshmidt et al., 2020; Fiss, 2007, 2011; Misangyi et al., 2017). While the decomposition approach also endorses a combinatory view, it focuses on assessing the net effect of each combination on CCA by isolating their contributions from other CQ dimensions. For example, Schlaegel et al. (2021) found that the combination of cognitive and metacognitive CQ explains 4% of work adjustment, assuming no impact from motivational and behavioral CQ. While this method provides useful insights into the contributions of specific combinations, it does not capture the dynamic interdependencies among CQ dimensions. Similarly, the aggregation approach, which combines all CQ dimensions into a single score, obscures the unique contributions and interplays of individual dimensions. In contrast, the configurational approach provides a complementary perspective by examining patterns of interaction among CQ dimensions as part of broader configurations. Rather than focusing on the net effect of individual combinations or an aggregate score, it emphasizes how CQ dimensions work together to produce CCA outcomes. This aligns with CQ's original conceptualization, which emphasizes the concerted action of dimensions as key to effective intercultural outcomes (Earley & Ang, 2003). Earley and Mosakowski (2004) illustrated this through the analogy of coordination among an individual's head (cognitive and metacognitive CQ), heart (motivational CQ), and body (behavioral CQ), highlighting how their intricate interplays underpin successful adaptation. By investigating the configurations of interaction patterns and their combined influence on outcomes, the configurational approach offers a more nuanced and holistic understanding of how CQ capabilities collectively drive CCA outcomes, which decomposition or aggregation approaches cannot fully capture.

Second, the configurational approach supports equifinality-the idea that different configurations of causal conditions can lead to the same outcome (Fainshmidt et al., 2020; Fiss, 2007; Meyer et al., 1993). In CQ research, equifinality suggests that individuals may exhibit diverse CQ profiles with different combinations of strengths and weaknesses. For example, some individuals may succeed as specialists (i.e. with higher specific CQ factors but lower overall CQ), while others succeed as generalists (i.e. with higher overall CQ but lower specific factors) (Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2023; Thomas et al., 2015). Despite these differences, individuals with diverse CQ profiles can be equally effective due to the compensatory effects among CQ capabilities (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Thomas et al., 2015). For example, expatriate managers with low cultural knowledge may succeed through motivation and perseverance, while others demonstrate culturally appropriate responses by mimicking host country behaviors (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). This suggests that expatriates can leverage strengths to offset weaknesses and achieve work adjustment success (Ang et al., 2020; Gelfand et al., 2008; Ott & Michailova, 2018).

Finally, the configurational approach incorporates causal asymmetry, meaning a condition's impact on an outcome can vary—positive in some cases, negative in others (Fainshmidt et al., 2020). Gelfand et al. (2008) highlighted CQ's 'dark side', where high CQ may challenge self-identity, diminish a sense of belonging, and lead to an extremely relativistic worl-dview. Recent evidence supports this dual impact, with research showing how extensive cultural knowledge can hinder creativity (Chua & Ng, 2017) and how overconfidence in CQ can result in lower performance (Iskhakova, 2018). In the context of expatriate CCA, Brand et al. (2023) proposed that overadjustment through excessive mimicry of local practices could backfire, leading to strained work relationships. These findings underscore the need to examine how configurations of CQ dimensions produce both positive and negative outcomes. By adopting the configurational approach, our research takes the first step toward extending theory in this direction.

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Taken together, the configurational approach enables the assessment of CQ dimension configurations that are sufficient for work adjustment and explores whether deficiencies in some CQ capabilities can be counterbalanced by strengths in others. It further permits the examination of whether specific configurations of CQ dimensions might have adverse effects on work adjustment. By capturing the complex interplays among CQ dimensions, this approach builds on prior research and provides nuanced insights that are often overlooked when CQ dimensions are examined as an aggregate whole, in isolation, or through decomposed combinations. Nevertheless, the examination of such configurations must consider the boundary conditions of CQ, as discussed in the next section.

#### 2.2. Configurations of CQ dimensions and their boundary conditions

Current debate in the theory development of the CQ-CCA link recognizes the importance and impact of contextual factors (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018; Stoermer et al., 2021). In CQ-CCA research, two studies (Chen et al., 2010; Song et al., 2023) have drawn upon TAT to examine how cultural distance and motivational CQ interact to influence work adjustment. According to TAT, situational facilitators are boundary conditions where intensified environmental demands enhance the relevance and expression of a particular trait (Tett et al., 2021; Tett & Burnett, 2003). Cultural distance, as Chen et al. (2010) and Song et al. (2023) argued, acts as a situational facilitator by heightening stress in unfamiliar environments, thereby necessitating the activation of motivational CQ. However, their findings show that while cultural distance increases the need for motivational CQ, this capability alone is not sufficient for successful work adjustment in contexts characterized by high cultural distance. This suggests that expatriates may need to combine motivational CQ with other CQ capabilities to adjust effectively in culturally distant countries. Thus, further research is needed to investigate how configurations of CQ capabilities jointly respond to varying degrees of cultural distance.

Our study examines both cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty as important boundary conditions for the configurational effects of CQ dimensions on work adjustment, either jointly or separately. Focusing solely on objective cultural differences may oversimplify the complex dynamics of CCA as it does not account for how individuals perceive and experience these differences (Jenkins & Mockaitis, 2010; Stoermer et al., 2022). Research shows that expatriates' perceptions of cultural differences, or perceived cultural novelty, hold greater significance for CCA than objective cultural distance (Ren et al., 2014). Perceived cultural novelty, defined as the subjective mental representation of cultural differences within an expatriate's cognitive system (Stoermer et al., 2022), can lead to stress, feelings of being overwhelmed, exacerbated isolation, and reduced confidence in working with local colleagues and clients. This sense of uncertainty and unfamiliarity may compel expatriates to activate their CQ. Despite its importance, prior CQ-CCA research has rarely considered perceived cultural novelty as a boundary condition for CQ. More importantly, perceived cultural novelty may interact with cultural distance, influencing CCA in complex ways (Jenkins & Mockaitis, 2010). For example, Hong Kong Chinese expatriates assigned to China experienced adjustment difficulties due to their perception of assumed cultural similarity between the two regions (Selmer & Shiu, 1999). Similarly, overestimating the ease of doing business in the U.K. led to maladjustment for Australian expatriates (Fenwick et al., 2003). These examples highlight the complex interaction between perceptions and reality, which can create novel situational cues that trigger the use of CQ.

In addition to their roles as situational facilitators of CO, cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty may also function as situational constraints that limit the expression and effectiveness of CQ. Constraints are boundary conditions that reduce the relevance of a given trait, thereby weakening its impact on outcomes (Stoermer et al., 2021; Tett et al., 2021). Building on this notion, we propose that cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty can, in certain contexts, undermine the effectiveness of CQ, resulting in lower levels of work adjustment. For example, in situations where cultural distance is minimal, CQ may become less relevant, and an over-reliance on it could prompt expatriates to make unnecessary adjustments, causing frustration and reducing effectiveness (Brand et al., 2023). Similarly, if CQ is inappropriately triggered by high perceived cultural differences that do not actually exist, this misalignment may cause confusion and maladjustment. These examples illustrate how the interplay of situational constraints, imposed by either cultural distance, perceived cultural novelty, or their combination, can hinder the appropriate expression of CQ, ultimately undermining successful work adjustment.

# 3. Methods

# 3.1. Data collection and sample

Data from this study were derived from a larger survey to assess expatriates' CCA in the Czech Republic. The country has seen a surge in foreign investors, particularly in the financial services, wholesale and retail, and motor vehicle manufacturing sectors (Szabo, 2019). The unique set of national cultural values (Hofstede et al., 2010) differentiates it from its Western neighbors and Asian counterparts. Furthermore, the country has consistently ranked among the top three destinations for expatriates since 2017 for its economic prosperity, job opportunities, and work-life balance. Such situations foster conditions for a substantial expatriate presence since the country joined the European Union in 2004, with nearly 600,000 long-term or permanent residence foreigners reported by the Czech Statistical Office at the end of 2019.

We used a computerized self-administered questionnaire in English for data collection. We secured the clarity of the wording through a pilot study (N=10), after which minor modifications were made. The questionnaire assured participants of anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest responses. Respondents were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers. Additionally, key constructs were placed in separate sections of the questionnaire, interspersed with other items to create psychological separation between related variables. The survey was administered via a web-based platform, requiring respondents to move to a new page before answering questions related to a different construct. To minimize fatigue, the survey was designed to be concise and easy to navigate.

Following the common practice in expatriate research (e.g. Lee & Sukoco, 2010), we contacted the human resource (HR) departments of multinational companies in the country via emails and phone calls. Successful cases saw HR departments forwarding an email with a brief introduction and a link to the questionnaire to their expatriates. Nine multinational companies participated in our research. Since the organizations themselves distributed the survey, we could not track how many invitations were sent out, thus making it impossible to calculate a response rate. We received 210 returned responses, out of which 106 were complete and usable. 70% of the participants were male, and 43% of them were married. They have an average of 6.5 years of international experience (i.e. time they worked outside of their home country) and an average age of 33.5. The participants, representing 35 countries, were predominantly from Europe (78%), with the remaining 22% from the rest of the world.

# **3.2.** Constructs and measures

We measured work adjustment using Black and Stephens' (1989) 3-item scale, which includes 'job and responsibilities in the Czech Republic,' working with Czech co-workers,' and 'supervising Czech subordinates.' Response options ranged from 1 being 'not adjusted at all' to 5 being 'extremely well adjusted'. CQ was measured using Ang et al. (2007) 20-item Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS). CQS includes 6 items for cognitive CQ, 4 items for metacognitive CQ, 5 Items for motivational CQ

and 5 items for behavioral CQ (see Appendix A for sample items). Response options ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Cultural distance was measured following Kogut and Singh (1988) formula, using Hofstede's four dimensions (individualism, power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance). We opted for these dimensions because they allowed us to calculate cultural distance for all the countries in this study. Perceived cultural novelty was measured using one item on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Participants indicated the extent to which the Czech Republic culture is different from their home country, with 5 = extremely different and 1 = very little difference. A correlation table of the key constructs is presented in Table 1.

The measurement model with all multi-item constructs was assessed in a confirmatory factor analysis under Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimator, using Mplus (ver. 7.4). They are specified as reflective constructs in the model, following the original conceptualization from respective studies. The measurement model is specified to allow each construct to be covaried to all others. Mplus model fit output provides a range of absolute fit and incremental fit indexes, which show that the specified measurement model has a good fit, following the thresholds suggested in the literature (Hair et al., 2006), with  $\chi^2$  (142) = 190.35 (p < 0.01), comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.951, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.940, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.057 and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.060. A significant pvalue of  $\chi^2$ can be expected as the number of items in the model is higher than 12 (21 in our study), given the sample size is smaller than 250. The  $\chi^2/$ degree of freedom ratio is 1.34 (<2), which provides an additional reassurance on the goodness of fit.

A good convergent validity is observed, following the assessment procedure suggested by Hair et al. (2006). First, factor loadings are between 0.57 and 0.89 (Appendix A), which exceed the threshold of 0.5. Second, the composite reliability (CR) of the four constructs ranges from 0.78 to 0.90 (Table 2), well above the suggested thresholds of 0.6–0.7. Average variance extracted (AVE) values are between 0.55 and 0.69 (Table 2), all greater than 0.5, which indicates that these constructs can explain more

Table 1.	Correlation	matrix.
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WA   MEGCQ   COGCQ   MOTCQ   BEHCQ   CD   PCD     WA   1              PCD       PCD								
WA 1   MEGCQ 0.08 1   COGCQ 0.01 0.42** 1   MOTCQ 0.14 0.51** 0.37** 1   BEHCQ 0.02 0.46** 0.30** 0.49** 1   CD 0.27** -0.20* -0.02 -0.23* -0.31** 1   PCN -0.31** 0.13 0.10 0.26** 0.37** -0.62** 1		WA	MEGCQ	COGCQ	MOTCQ	BEHCQ	CD	PCD
MEGCQ   0.08   1     COGCQ   0.01   0.42**   1     MOTCQ   0.14   0.51**   0.37**   1     BEHCQ   0.02   0.46**   0.30**   0.49**   1     CD   0.27**   -0.20*   -0.02   -0.23*   -0.31**   1     PCN   -0.31**   0.13   0.10   0.26**   0.37**   -0.62**   1	WA	1						
COGCQ   0.01   0.42**   1     MOTCQ   0.14   0.51**   0.37**   1     BEHCQ   0.02   0.46**   0.30**   0.49**   1     CD   0.27**   -0.20*   -0.02   -0.23*   -0.31**   1     PCN   -0.31**   0.13   0.10   0.26**   0.37**   -0.62**   1	MEGCQ	0.08	1					
MOTCQ   0.14   0.51**   0.37**   1     BEHCQ   0.02   0.46**   0.30**   0.49**   1     CD   0.27**   -0.20*   -0.02   -0.23*   -0.31**   1     PCN   -0.31**   0.13   0.10   0.26**   0.37**   -0.62**   1	COGCQ	0.01	0.42**	1				
BEHCQ   0.02   0.46**   0.30**   0.49**   1     CD   0.27**   -0.20*   -0.02   -0.23*   -0.31**   1     PCN   -0.31**   0.13   0.10   0.26**   0.37**   -0.62**   1	MOTCQ	0.14	0.51**	0.37**	1			
CD   0.27**   -0.20*   -0.02   -0.23*   -0.31**   1     PCN   -0.31**   0.13   0.10   0.26**   0.37**   -0.62**   1	BEHCQ	0.02	0.46**	0.30**	0.49**	1		
PCN -0.31** 0.13 0.10 0.26** 0.37** -0.62** 1	CD	0.27**	-0.20*	-0.02	-0.23*	-0.31**	1	
	PCN	-0.31**	0.13	0.10	0.26**	0.37**	-0.62**	1

Notes: WA: work adjustment; MEGCQ: metacognitive CQ; COGCQ: cognitive CQ; MOTCQ: motivational CQ; BEHCQ: behavioral CQ; CD: cultural distance; PCN: perceived cultural novelty.

than half of the variance in its indicators. The discriminant validity is deemed satisfactory as the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than its pairwise correlation with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

We assessed common method variance (CMV) using the unmeasured latent variable method (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012; Richardson et al., 2009). This approach accounts for method bias at the item level by introducing a latent construct into the theoretical factor model, which has no unique observed indicators and captures the shared variance. Thus, the model fit differential test of the two nested models (Model 0 and Model 1) provides evidence for CMV. We specified Model 0 to contain only one of the CQ factors and the work adjustment factor, as defined in the original measurement model. Model 1 builds upon Model 0 by adding a latent factor on which all items are loaded. The Log-Likelihood Ratio Test (p=0.628) reveals that Model 1 (Log-Likelihood=-752.428, df=4), with the added factor, does not significantly improve the model fit compared to Model 0 (Log-Likelihood=-755.972, df=13). This allows us to conclude that CMV is not present and, therefore, does not pose a concern.

# 3.3. QCA and analytical process

This study employed fsQCA, a method rooted in configurational thinking, for several reasons. First, fsQCA is well-suited for exploring the complex interplays among CQ dimensions, cultural distance, and perceived cultural novelty, as it identifies how these conditions combine to influence expatriates' work adjustment (Ragin, 2008). Unlike variance-based methods, which often analyze variables in isolation or through limited two- or three-way interactions, fsQCA enables a holistic examination of configurations that lead to CCA outcomes (Fainshmidt et al., 2020; Ragin, 2008). Second, fsQCA facilitates the identification of various pathways that contribute to work adjustment outcomes. This aligns closely with the study's goal of exploring CQ profiles (i.e. configurations of CQ strengths and weaknesses) and the compensatory effects among CQ capabilities. Third, fsQCA enables the examination of both positive and negative outcomes associated with CQ. This is particularly relevant given

	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5				
1. Work adjustme	nt 0.78	0.55	0.74								
2. Metacognitive	CQ 0.87	0.62	0.09	0.79							
3. Cognitive CQ	0.86	0.55	0.02	0.46	0.74						
4. Motivational CO	Q 0.79	0.55	0.14	0.61	0.43	0.74					
5. Behavioral CQ	0.90	0.69	0.02	0.47	0.31	0.59	0.83				

Table 2. Statistics for convergent and discriminant validity.

Notes: square-root of AVE in bold on the diagonal; correlations between constructs below the diagonal.

recent evidence of CQ's potential 'dark side', an aspect that is difficult to capture with traditional methods (Fainshmidt et al., 2020; Ragin, 2008).

While fsQCA does not eliminate the potential impact of omitted variables, it differs from correlational methods in that missing conditions primarily affect solution coverage rather than introducing bias in effect estimation (Witt et al., 2022). Given this, we rely on theory and empirical research to ensure the inclusion of relevant conditions (Radaelli & Wagemann, 2019). The six conditions in this study were selected based on established CQ and expatriate adjustment models (e.g. Ang et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2010; Ren et al., 2014; Stoermer et al., 2021), ensuring that the identified configurations align with meaningful constructs in the literature. Furthermore, fsQCA's configurational approach reduces reliance on traditional control variables, as it focuses on how multiple conditions jointly influence outcomes rather than estimating independent effects (Fainshmidt et al., 2020).

We followed closely the QCA literature to undertake the analysis, including three analytic phases (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012), using the fs/QCA software package (ver. 4.1). First, calibration is required to indicate each case's (i.e. each expatriate) membership in all conditions and the outcome. Second, an analysis of necessity is performed to identify necessary conditions that are always present when an outcome occurs. Finally, an analysis of sufficiency is performed to identify configurations that consistently lead to the outcome. Further details of these analytical phases are provided in the following sections.

#### 3.3.1. Calibration

The first analytical phase in fsQCA is to calibrate the constructs to form fuzzy sets with their values ranging from 0 to 1 to indicate their membership (Ragin, 2008). The scores for all constructs were carried forward to be calibrated. In the case of multi-item constructs, a mean score was calculated to represent each construct prior to calibration. In line with the QCA literature, a direct method (Ragin, 2008) was used to calibrate conditions with a 5-point Likert-type scale, including work adjustment, perceived cultural novelty and all four types of CQ. Researchers should use their theoretical understanding that is external to the data to determine meaningful qualitative anchors that denote full membership, non-membership, and the crossover point (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). We used a value of 5 (e.g. 'strongly agree' on the scale) to represent full membership, 4 as the crossover point and 3 (indicating a neutral position as the mid-point of the scale) as non-membership. This higher threshold ensures that the identified configurations reflect strong CQ capabilities and their interplay with boundary conditions, aligning with the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The direct method 14 😉 L. LEI ET AL.

was also applied to calibrate actual cultural distance based on percentiles at 90% (indicating very high cultural distance), 70% (mid-point) and 50% (indicating below average) with full membership at 2.74 (i.e. 90%), crossover point at 2.18 (i.e. 70%) and non-membership at 1.50 (i.e. 50%). To avoid excluding any cases with the exact score of 0.5, we follow Fiss (2011) and add a constant of 0.001 to all scores falling below the full membership score of 1.

# 3.3.2. Necessity analysis

Following the calibration, we performed an analysis of necessity by testing whether any of the conditions could be considered necessary for the outcome to occur. A condition is considered necessary if it is present in all cases that share the same outcome. Table 3 shows the results for both high work adjustment (i.e. the presence of work adjustment) and low work adjustment (i.e. the absence of work adjustment).

Following Ragin (2008), a consistency score above 0.90 suggests that the antecedent is necessary or almost always necessary for the outcome to occur. The coverage scores represent the ratio of the antecedent condition sets and the outcome set, thus indicating the relevance or importance of antecedent conditions (Ragin, 2008). The analysis shows that the absence of perceived cultural novelty (~PCN) has a consistency score of 0.91. However, inspection of its coverage score suggests that it is a trivial factor with a coverage score of 0.62, which is below the threshold of 0.75 (Goertz, 2006). The necessity analyses therefore show that no condition is necessary for high or low work adjustment.

# 3.3.3. Sufficiency analyses

We performed two sufficiency analyses to identify the configurations of CQ dimensions and boundary conditions that lead to (1) high work adjustment, and (2) low work adjustment. Initially, two respective truth tables that displayed all logically possible configurations, calculated as  $2^{k}$ ,

	High work a	djustment	Low work a	djustment
Conditions	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
CD	0.44	0.79	0.26	0.34
~CD	0.63	0.54	0.84	0.52
PCN	0.15	0.58	0.25	0.67
~PCN	0.91	0.62	0.83	0.41
COGCQ	0.37	0.75	0.41	0.60
~COGCQ	0.80	0.65	0.83	0.48
MEGCQ	0.67	0.71	0.67	0.50
~MEGCQ	0.53	0.69	0.62	0.58
MOTCQ	0.66	0.71	0.63	0.48
~MOTCQ	0.52	0.66	0.63	0.58
BEHCQ	0.46	0.73	0.46	0.53
~BEHCQ	0.70	0.64	0.76	0.50

Table	3.	Analysis	of	necessary	conditions.
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where k refers to the number of antecedent conditions (i.e. 6 in this study). Not all configurations in a truth table will be considered since some do not appear to be empirically possible or relevant. Therefore, a truth table needs to be refined based on the recommended thresholds in the QCA literature (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Considering the number of cases in this study, we set a frequency cut-off value of 2 (Fiss, 2011), meaning only those configurations observed in two or more cases were preserved and the configurations with less than two cases were treated as logical remainders.

Next, we encoded the outcome for each row (configuration) as 1 if it simultaneously satisfied two thresholds: (1) raw consistency score was equal or higher than 0.8, and (2) PRI (Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency) consistency score was equal or higher than 0.75 (Greckhamer et al., 2018). Following these steps, we chose a consistency cut-off value of 0.88 for high work adjustment and 0.89 for low work adjustment. In the final step, the refined truth table was subject to a logical minimization process, using the Quine-McCluskey algorithm, to derive complex, intermediate, and parsimonious solutions based on the assumptions of logical remainders (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). The complex solution represents the most conservative solution as it makes no assumption on the logical remainders, whereas the parsimonious solution accounts for all logical remainders. The intermediate solution lies in between them in that it produces configurations based on balancing the consideration of the logical remainders, i.e. theoretical possibilities. Table 4 summarizes the configurations for high work adjustment, and Table 5 shows the solutions for low work adjustment.

Consistent with best practice in fsQCA research, we reported the intermediate solutions as they take into consideration easy counterfactuals that are in line with theoretical knowledge and prior empirical evidence (Fiss, 2011; Ragin, 2008). In addition, we followed Fiss (2011) and included the parsimonious solutions in the intermediate solutions by indicating core conditions (i.e. those that appear in both parsimonious and intermediate solutions) and peripheral conditions (i.e. those that only appear in intermediate solutions). While conditions shown in a configuration are integral parts of the whole, the 'coreness' of a condition indicates its strength of causal influence on the outcome with core conditions being more important than peripheral ones (Fiss, 2011). The solution table shows that the five solutions for high work adjustment exhibit a consistency of 0.90, and the three solutions that sufficiently produce low work adjustment have an overall solution consistency of 0.88. As such, the consistency for all individual configurations as well as the overall solutions are all above the recommended threshold of 0.75 (Ragin, 2008).

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	Solutions for high work adjustment					
Configuration	1a	1b	2a	2b	2c	
Boundary conditions CD	•	•	•	•		
PCN	Ň	×	Ň	Ň	Ň	
CQ capabilities COGCQ	8	$\otimes$	•	•	$\otimes$	
MEGCQ		$\otimes$	Ó	•	Ó	
MOTCQ	$\otimes$	_	Ó	$\otimes$	•	
BEHCQ	Ň	$\otimes$	Ň	ĕ		
Consistency Raw coverage Unique coverage Overall solution consistency	0.90 0.28 0.04	0.89 0.28 0.03	0.94 0.10 0.02 0.90	0.96 0.07 0.004	0.97 0.08 0.01	
Overall solution coverage			0.36			

#### Table 4. Configurations for high work adjustment.

Note.

\*Black circles indicate the presence of a condition, and circles with 'x' indicate its absence. Large circles indicate core conditions; small ones indicate peripheral conditions. Blank spaces indicate 'don't care'.

	Solu	itions for low work adjust	ment
Configuration	3a	3b	4
Boundary conditions	0	0	0
CD	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	8
PCN	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	•
CO capabilities			
COGCQ	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$
115660		0	
MEGCQ	$\bullet$	$\otimes$	
MOTCQ	$\otimes$	$\otimes$	$\otimes$
BEHCQ	$\otimes$	•	
Consistency	0.89	0.93	0.95
Raw coverage	0.32	0.24	0.12
Unique coverage	0.11	0.03	0.003
Overall solution consistency		0.88	
Overall solution coverage		0.36	

#### Table 5. Configurations for low work adjustment.

# 4. Findings and propositions

Our fsQCA results identify five configurations that lead to high work adjustment and three configurations that lead to low work adjustment. Consistent with the exploratory nature of our research, we develop propositions associated with each configuration.

#### 4.1. High work adjustment

Table 4 shows five configurations of CQ dimensions that are linked to high work adjustment when a large cultural distance is present, but the perception of such differences is absent. Within these five configurations all indicating the presence of cultural distance and the absence of perceived cultural novelty, two underlying structures connecting different CQ dimensions are found. Configuration 1a and 1b are two permutations of one structure, while Configuration 2a, 2b and 2c are three permutations of the other. Configuration 1a and 1b describe two groups of expatriates who lack the ability to interact effectively in cross-cultural situations and often mistakenly assume that home and host country cultures are similar. Despite the absence of CQ capabilities, these expatriates reportedly adjust well in a culturally distant environment. Expatriates in Configuration 1a may avoid the need to interact with host country nationals or develop any intercultural capability (Black et al., 1991) by relying on the support of other expatriates from their home countries. The absence of motivational CQ as a core condition indicates their unwillingness to engage with the host country culture (Earley & Ang, 2003). Expatriates in Configuration 1b may have adopted an 'ostrich' strategy when working in a foreign country (Li et al., 2019). Much like the birds, they 'bury' their heads in the 'sand' and ignore the host cultural environment. They may feel that they adjust well, but this perception is due to their unawareness of the actual cultural dynamics at work. The absence of cognitive CQ and metacognitive CQ as core conditions demonstrates the closed-mindedness of these expatriates (Earley & Ang, 2003).

**Proposition 1:** Expatriates without CQ capabilities can achieve high work adjustment in environments with high cultural distance when they perceive the cultural novelty to be low.

Configurations 2a, 2b and 2c reveal three types of expatriates, all making use of the majority of CQ capabilities with unique combinations of strengths and weaknesses to achieve high work adjustment. Configuration 2a describes expatriates exhibiting strong cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational CQ as core conditions, which enable them to understand cultural differences and strategize effectively for intercultural interactions fueled by consistent motivation and engagement. However, despite these CQ strengths, they may still struggle with adapting their behavior to fit different cultural contexts, as indicated by the absence of behavioral CQ as a core condition. This difficulty can manifest in challenges with modifying their communication styles, gestures, and overall behavior to align with the cultural expectations of their host country (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). Even with such a difficulty, the strong presence of the other three CQ conditions together are sufficient for high work adjustment. Configuration 2b represents expatriates who achieve work adjustment through a rich knowledge of cultural differences and outstanding behavioral capabilities, as cognitive and behavioral CQ are core conditions. In other words, these expatriates excel at adapting their behavior and interactions to fit various cultural contexts based on their cultural knowledge. Metacognitive CQ is a peripheral condition, suggesting that these expatriates do not heavily rely on reflective thinking or cultural strategizing to adapt to their host environment. However, their adjustment is not driven by a strong personal interest or enthusiasm for cultural adaptation, as indicated by the absence of motivational CQ. Their approach is more practical and behavior-oriented, relying on the direct application of cultural knowledge and behavioral skills, which contrasts with expatriates in Configuration 2a, who depend more on cognitive planning and motivational strategies to navigate cultural interactions.

Configuration 2c characterizes expatriates having limited extensive or structured understanding of cultural differences (i.e. the absence of cognitive CQ as a core condition) but excelling at quickly processing new information (i.e. the presence of metacognitive CQ as a core condition) and adapting their communication styles, actions, and interactions fluidly for various cultural contexts (i.e. the presence of behavioral CQ as a core condition). While they possess some level of motivation to engage with the local culture, it is not a central driver of their adjustment. This configuration suggests that this group of expatriates achieve high work adjustment through responding intuitively to the new cultural environment without extensive preparation or knowledge of cultural differences, which contrasts with the expatriates in both Configurations 2a and 2b.

Importantly, these configurations demonstrate that significant cultural differences, coupled with the absence of perceived cultural novelty, serve as a situational facilitator for the effective deployment of CQ capabilities. In this context, the substantial, objective cultural differences demand the use of CQ, but the lack of perceived cultural novelty allows the expatriates to navigate these differences without feeling mentally overwhelmed. This combination of boundary conditions enables expatriates to confidently apply their CQ capabilities to manage cultural challenges as they arise, free from the burden of perceiving their environment as overly complex. As a result, they can effectively adapt and adjust in the work-place, leading to more successful work adjustment outcomes.

**Proposition 2:** Expatriates effectively making use of distinct configurations of CQ capabilities can achieve high work adjustment in environments with high cultural distance when they perceive the cultural novelty to be low.

#### 4.2. Low work adjustment

Table 5 reports three configurations related to low work adjustment. Configurations 3a and 3b reveal two types of expatriates who struggle to adjust at work despite facing minimal objective and perceived cultural differences. Expatriates in Configuration 3a exhibit heightened metacognitive CQ, characterized by an acute awareness and constant mental processing of their environment. However, the absence of both cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty imposes a situational constraint that negates the benefits of metacognitive CQ. In this context, where there is little need for extensive strategizing and divergent thinking, their heightened metacognitive CQ becomes a liability rather than an asset. This constraint not only undermines the positive effects of metacognitive CQ but also introduces further stress, especially when these expatriates lack cultural knowledge, motivation, and behavioral flexibility to sustain and balance their strong mental processing capabilities. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that solely relying on excessive metacognitive CQ can hinder intercultural interactions, particularly in contexts with minimal cultural differences (Adair et al., 2013).

Expatriates in Configuration 3b possess a repertoire of behavioral responses but lack all other CQ capabilities. The situational constraint created by the combined absence of significant cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty makes their behavioral flexibility counterproductive. If expatriates in the previous group struggle because they are overthinking, this group struggles because they are overacting in a situation that does not call for behavioral adjustments. As Thomas (2006) suggests, highly culturally intelligent individuals must know not only how to adapt, but also when and to what extent they should adapt. In some situations, the best option is not to adapt at all. However, expatriates in this group lack other CQ capabilities to help them recognize when less adaptation is more effective. Their tendency to overact in an environment that does not demand such flexibility can lead to behaviors that are misinterpreted by host country nationals as insincere or mocking, ultimately damaging their workplace relationships (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Thomas, 2006).

**Proposition 3:** Expatriates solely relying on either metacognitive CQ or behavioral CQ can experience low work adjustment in environments with low cultural distance when they perceive cultural novelty to be low.

Expatriates in Configuration 4 possess strong metacognitive and behavioral CQ, despite lacking cultural knowledge and motivation. However, different from Configurations 3a and 3b, the situational constraint created by the presence of perceived cultural novelty in an environment with minimal objective cultural differences negates the benefits of these CQ capabilities. Specifically, these expatriates operate under a magnified mental representation of their cultural surroundings that is misaligned and distorts reality. The presence of perceived cultural novelty as a core condition suggests that these expatriates may overly focus on minor cultural differences at their workplace (Jenkins & Mockaitis, 2010) or cling to exaggerated stereotypes of the host culture (Adler, 2008). In this constrained context, their CQ capabilities become stressors that lead to low work adjustment.

**Proposition 4:** Expatriates with metacognitive and behavioral CQ can experience low work adjustment when they perceive high cultural novelty in environments with low cultural distance.

# 4.3. Robustness test

We assess the robustness of the results by changing consistency thresholds and recalibrating the membership anchors (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). First, we varied the consistency thresholds for high work adjustment, testing one model with a higher raw consistency score of 0.90 and another with a lower score of 0.87. Similarly, for low work adjustment, we tested a higher threshold of 0.93 and a lower score of 0.89. As expected, increasing the consistency threshold resulted in higher overall consistency but lower overall coverage, while lowering the threshold increased overall coverage at the expense of consistency.

Second, we recalibrated the membership thresholds, where full membership, crossover, and non-membership were defined as 4, 3, and 2, respectively. Under this alternative calibration, Configurations 1a and 1b in the original analysis, which showed pathways for expatriates to achieve high work adjustment without CQ capabilities, were not present. Their absence suggests that Proposition 1 is sensitive to calibration choices and may not hold under alternative threshold assumptions. Consequently, under the recalibrated scheme, all configurations associated with high work adjustment include at least some CQ capabilities, indicating that CQ may indeed be necessary to achieve positive outcomes depending on how membership is defined. Similarly, for low work adjustment, the recalibration eliminated Configuration 3b, though the overarching interpretation of Proposition 3 remains similar, emphasizing that a combination of low cultural distance and low perceived cultural novelty constrains the positive effects of certain CQ capabilities.

Despite these variations, the remaining configurations for both high and low work adjustment show consistent patterns across sensitivity tests. These results underscore the exploratory nature of fsQCA and the importance of calibration choices in shaping specific outcomes. Detailed results from the robustness tests are provided in Appendix B.

#### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1. Theoretical and methodological implications

Our findings have several implications for theory and research. First, we adopt a configurational approach to studying CQ dimensions and their impact on cross-cultural work adjustment. Unlike prior aggregate, dimensional, and decomposition approaches, our study emphasizes the dynamic interdependencies among CQ dimensions and how their combined influence shapes work adjustment outcomes. Prior research often suggests that certain dimensions, such as behavioral CQ and motivational CQ (e.g. Ang et al., 2007), are indispensable ingredients for international adaptation. In contrast, our findings demonstrate that CCA emerges from the intricate interplay of CQ dimensions, where their effects are conditional on specific configurations (Earley & Ang, 2003; Gelfand et al., 2008; Van Dyne et al., 2012). The configurational approach captures both the unique effects of individual CQ dimensions and their combined impact. This challenges the conventional notion of CQ as either a uniformly strong trait or a set of independent dimensions (e.g. Ang et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2015). Instead, our study highlights CQ as a dynamic system of interrelated capabilities, where different configurations of strengths and weaknesses yield varying outcomes. This perspective broadens the scholarly understanding of CQ and complements aggregate, dimensional, and decomposition approaches by uncovering pathways and conditional relationships that may otherwise remain hidden. It paves the way for future research to explore how specific configurations of CQ strengths and weaknesses lead to different outcomes across diverse expatriate contexts.

Second, our research addresses the critical need to examine CQ's boundary conditions, particularly the role of perceived cultural novelty in shaping the CQ-CCA relationship (Gelfand et al., 2008; Ott & Michailova, 2018; Stoermer et al., 2021). While prior research has primarily focused on cultural distance as a boundary condition, often emphasizing its influence on motivational CQ, our research highlights how expatriates' perceptions of cultural surroundings interact with objective cultural differences to influence the effectiveness of CQ capabilities. Our findings reveal that significant cultural distance, coupled with the absence of perceived cultural novelty, functions as a situational facilitator that activates CQ capabilities. Conversely, we also identify situational constraints where CQ capabilities become less effective: in environments with low cultural

distance and low perceived cultural novelty and in environments with low cultural distance but high perceived cultural novelty. These insights challenge previous assumptions about CQ's universal impact across cultural contexts (Ang et al., 2007; Ott & Michailova, 2018). They further underscore the need for integrated models that synthesize objective and subjective boundary conditions to comprehensively explain CQ dynamics (Brand et al., 2023).

Third, our research contributes to the emerging discourse on the dark side of CQ, which is often overlooked in empirical studies (Brand et al., 2023; Fang et al., 2018; Gelfand et al., 2008). By adopting a configurational approach, we uncover how specific configurations of CQ dimensions can, under situational constraints, lead to low work adjustment. This nuanced understanding challenges the simplistic notion that higher CQ universally translates to better outcomes, emphasizing instead the complex and asymmetrical relationships between CQ and CCA (Chua & Ng, 2017; Iskhakova, 2018). Our findings offer an important contribution to the CQ literature by answering *when* CQ exerts positive effects on outcomes, and *when* it does not (Adair et al., 2013; Gelfand et al., 2008).

Finally, our methodological approach using fsQCA responds to recent calls for embracing new analytical techniques in international business (Fainshmidt et al., 2020) and international HRM research (Fan et al., 2021). Traditional variance-based methods, which focus on net effects, may be constrained in capturing the complex, conjunctural nature of CQ dimensions in explaining CCA. As can be seen from the correlations in Table 1, there is no significant correlation between work adjustment and CQ dimensions. In contrast, fsQCA enables us to uncover multiple, non-linear pathways that lead to the same adjustment outcomes, which demonstrate conjunctural causation, equifinality, and causal asymmetry. This analytical approach provides an additional aspect to bridge the mixed findings in the CQ literature, where prior studies focusing on net effects yielded inconsistent conclusions. As such, our study contributes methodologically by demonstrating how fsQCA can complement conventional approaches and advance both theoretical and empirical understanding of the CQ-CCA link (Fainshmidt et al., 2020).

# 5.2. Managerial implications

This study offers some practical implications for improving expatriate CCA. First, by showing that different configurations of CQ dimensions can lead to both high and low work adjustment, our findings caution against the simplistic notion that 'more CQ is better' in expatriate selection. High overall CQ scores do not automatically guarantee suitability for international assignments. Instead, a nuanced understanding of how individual components of CQ interact within specific contexts is essential. Organizations should conduct thorough assessments to ascertain whether candidates possess the appropriate balance and combinations of CQ capabilities to meet the contextual demands of their roles. This approach ensures that candidates are not only generally culturally intelligent but also specifically equipped to handle the unique challenges they will face in their assignments.

Moreover, following the initial assessment of candidates' CQ profiles, organizations should implement tailored programs to address specific areas of development. The configurations for high and low work adjustment provide host companies with scenarios and templates for developing specific development programs for different types of expatriates. For instance, expatriates in Configuration 3a, who have strong metacognitive CQ but lack other CQ capabilities, would benefit from training designed to build a structured understanding of cultural differences and to cultivate a genuine curiosity towards cultural diversity (Earley & Ang, 2003). Such programs can enhance their cognitive and motivational CQ, bringing their capabilities more in line with the effective configuration seen in Configuration 2a. For expatriates who are deficient in either metacognitive or behavioral CQ, practical training methods such as dramaturgical exercises, role plays, and simulations can be highly effective in developing these skills (Tan & Chua, 2003). Additionally, given the importance of 'less is more' in some situations, training should also include scenarios that teach expatriates how to gauge when and how much adaptation is necessary (Thomas, 2006). Implementing these tailored programs ensures that expatriates are well equipped to navigate the complexities of CCA, increasing the likelihood of successful international assignments.

# 5.3. Limitations and future research

Despite our contributions, this study has some limitations that offer avenues for future research. First, our reliance on fsQCA as a research method introduces certain constraints. As a case-based approach, fsQCA focuses on uncovering patterns and configurations within the data rather than enabling statistical inference to broader populations. Accordingly, the findings in this study should be considered exploratory insights rather than generalizable conclusions. Future research should test the configurations identified in this study using larger, more diverse samples to enhance the robustness of the findings (Fainshmidt et al., 2020). This need for validation is particularly important for configurations 1a, 1b, and 3b, which were found to be absent under an alternative calibration threshold. Further research could employ longitudinal studies or experimental designs to substantiate these exploratory findings and further explore causal relationships. Second, the study design and measures used present limitations. The cross-sectional design limits our ability to examine how CQ configurations evolve over time. A longitudinal research design could explore whether different CQ configurations are effective at different adjustment stages (Setti et al., 2022). Similarly, future studies could investigate how configurations of CQ dimensions contribute to other aspects of CCA, including interaction adjustment and general adjustment, or other indicators of expatriate effectiveness, such as job satisfaction, expatriate performance, and premature return intention, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of CQ's role in expatriate effectiveness. In addition, we assessed perceived cultural novelty using a single-item measure. While single-item measures can be both valid and reliable and reduce respondent burden (e.g. Wanous et al., 1997), they may not fully capture the construct's complexity. We encourage future researchers to use multi-item instruments for more nuanced measurement.

Third, our study focuses on cultural distance and perceived cultural novelty as boundary conditions because we aim to build on and extend existing literature on the role of cultural distance in the CQ-CCA relationship (e.g. Chen et al., 2010; Song et al., 2023). Future research could explore other boundary conditions. In particular, our research assumes cultural distance symmetry, suggesting that, for example, expatriates from countries with lower individualism have similar adjustment experiences in the Czech Republic as those from countries with higher individualism. However, recent research highlights the potential significance of asymmetrical cultural distance-the directionality of cultural differences between home and host countries-in shaping expatriate adjustment. While one study finds no evidence of asymmetrical cultural distance moderating the CQ-CCA relationship (Zhang & Oczkowski, 2016), another suggests that asymmetrical cultural distance influences CCA by interacting with CQ (Zhang et al., 2021). Future research could leverage fsQCA to revisit the role of cultural distance asymmetry as a boundary condition for CQ. For example, fsQCA could identify whether certain CQ profiles are more effective in low-to-high cultural distance transitions compared to high-to-low transitions. Additionally, it could explore how cultural distance asymmetry interacts with perceived cultural novelty to produce diverse pathways that facilitate or constrain adjustment.

Finally, we acknowledge the critiques regarding CQ as a construct. Jackson (2022) questioned whether CQ should be measured, particularly given its reliance on self-reports, which may not fully capture cultural adaptability. While prior research suggests reasonable correlations between self and other ratings (Shannon & Begley, 2008), future studies could incorporate alternative assessment methods, such as peer or supervisor

ratings, behavioral observations, or experimental measures, to enhance measurement validity. In addition, Blasco et al. (2012) further critiqued CQ's conceptual foundation, arguing that it lacks identifiable, observable exemplars and may oversimplify how individuals navigate intercultural interactions. A valuable direction for future research would involve documenting empirical examples of expatriates' CCA in specific contexts (Blasco et al., 2012), using qualitative or mixed methods approaches to better understand how CQ is enacted in real-world scenarios. Such efforts could help refine and test the concept of CQ by grounding it in lived experiences.

#### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest reported by the author(s).

#### Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [LL], upon reasonable request.

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# Appendix A

	Constructs	Factor loadings
Work adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.77$ )		
WA1.	Your job and responsibilities in the Czech Republic	0.57
WA2.	Working with Czech co-workers.	0.85
WA3.	Supervising Czech subordinates.	0.78
Metacognitive CQ ( $a = 0.86$ )		
MECQ1.	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.	0.81
MECQ2.	I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me.	0.75
MECQ3.	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions.	0.89
MECQ4.	I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures	0.68
Cognitive CQ ( $a = 0.85$ )		
CCQ1.	I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures.	0.69
CCQ2.	I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.	0.82
CCQ3.	I know the marriage systems of other cultures.	0.80
CCQ4.	I know the arts and crafts of other cultures.	0.67
CCQ5.	I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.	0.72
Motivational CQ ( $\alpha = 0.78$ )		
MOCQ1.	l enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	0.71
MOCQ2.	I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.	0.73
MOCQ3.	I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	0.79
Behavioral CQ ( $\alpha = 0.90$ )		
BCQ1.	l change my verbal behavior (e.g. accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.	0.75
BCQ2.	I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.	0.81
BCQ3.	I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.	0.89
BCQ4.	I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.	0.87

Table A1. Measurement items and factor loadings.

# Appendix B.

	Reported configurations for high work adjustment						Reported configurations for low work adjustment			
Test No.	Test type	1a	1b	2a	2b	2c	Test type	3a	3b	4
1	Lower consistency cut-off to 0.87	Very similar	Very similar	Very similar	Identical	Very similar	Lower consistency cut-off to 0.83	Identical	Identical	Identical
2	Increase consistency cut-off to 0.90	Very similar	Very similar	Identical	Identical	Identical	Increase consistency cut-off to 0.93	Does not appear	Identical	Identical
3	Recalibration: using (4, 3, 2) as three qualitative anchors	Does not appear	Does not appear	Very similar	Very similar	Very similar	Recalibration: using (4, 3, 2) as three qualitative anchors	Very similar	Does not appear	Similar

Table B1. Robustness tests for high and low work adjustment

Note: We follow Schneider and Wagemann (2012) to evaluate changes in the robustness tests in comparison with our results as follows: (1) 'identical' indicates the configuration remains identical. (2) 'Very similar' indicates change in only one condition, such as the addition of one condition or the substitution of another condition. (3) 'Similar' indicates change in more than one condition, but there is no significant change in the core conditions. (4) 'Does not appear' indicates that the reported configuration does not appear in the robustness test.