

# Unlocking Global Success: The Role of Cultural Intelligence and International Experience in Enhancing Expatriates' Adjustment and Well-Being

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## Abstract

In today's increasingly interconnected world, the psychological well-being of expatriates remains a critical concern for organizations. This research analyzes the impact of informal field-based learning (IFBL) and expatriate leadership behaviors on increasing expatriate adjustment and well-being. Grounded in established theoretical models and extensive literature on cultural intelligence (CQ) and international experience, this study investigates the effect of CQ and international experience on expatriate performance; it employs a cross-sectional research method to administer questionnaires to the participants – Chinese expatriates working with Sinosteel Construction & Development Co. Ltda in Bolivia. Data was analyzed using SPSS and Hayes Process macro. Results show that IFBL has a large and highly significant positive impact on expatriate adjustment and psychological well-being. Furthermore, expatriate adjustment partially moderates the IFBL and well-being link, such that the relationship is stronger for those with higher IFBL scores. The study also looks at moderation effects, discovering that expatriate international experience (EIE) boosts the relationship between IFBL and adjustment. Thus, it has been determined that CQ does not exert a significant moderating effect on this relationship. Therefore, it provides useful suggestions to those multinational firms that want to improve their expatriate practices and policies. The current study proposes that organizations can enhance expatriate adjustment and organizational effectiveness by drawing attention to the role of informal learning and accenting the value of CQ, which can enhance the performance and well-being of expatriates.

**Keywords:** *Expatriates' informal field-based learning, Cultural intelligence, Expatriate adjustment, Expatriates' international experience, Employee well-being.*

## Introduction

In today's global business environment, firms increasingly rely on international assignments to gain strategic advantages, such as enhancing productivity in foreign subsidiaries, penetrating local markets, and strengthening relationships with host country stakeholders (Fan et al., 2021; Dowling et al., 1999). More organizations send employees to work outside their home countries as expatriates (Setti et al., 2022). Large and medium-sized firms have gradually embraced

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expatriation, with approximately 75% sending professionals abroad and 50% planning to increase this number (Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2024; Prihadyanti et al., 2022). However, while the importance of expatriation is well established, there is a notable gap in research on how adaptation, or the lack thereof, affects expatriates' well-being (Papadopoulos & Ezziane, 2020). Nevertheless, while numerous studies examine the factors that aim at cultural adaptation (Gai et al., 2021; Khakimova et al., 2022), the relationship between adjustment and well-being in expatriate employees has not been investigated. This is especially important because cultural adjustment is one of the most important factors affecting expatriates' performance and success in their assignments. It has been established that adjustment influences work performance, psychological well-being, and success of expatriates (Black et al., 2022). Hence, it is necessary to consider other factors that affect expatriate adjustment because lack of adjustment results in failure in assignments, which is evidenced by high expatriate failure rates (Corlăteanu, 2024; Zakaradze, 2024; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

This research examines the role of informal field-based learning and expatriate leadership behaviors in expatriate adjustment and well-being. Based on the theoretical frameworks (Caldwell et al., 2024; Derksen et al., 2024; Zakaria et al., 2023), this research will explore the impact of CQ and international experience on expatriate adjustment and performance. Further, it examines how expatriates' coaching, inclusiveness, and servant leadership behaviors affect local employees' performance and work-related well-being through informal learning. This study seeks to extend the knowledge of the expatriate adjustment process and its consequences for expatriates and host country employees. This study shows how expatriate leadership behaviors affect informal field-based learning and underscores the value of cultural intelligence and international experience in improving expatriates' adjustment and performance. The study advances the knowledge of international business and human resource management and provides practical recommendations for MNCs to enhance their expatriate management practices, policies, and leadership development efforts.

Based on the literature on expatriate adjustment, it is understood that not all expatriates will go through the process similarly (Han et al., 2022). As with other organizations, expatriates modify their behaviors and attitudes to fit the host countries' cultural norms to perform well and survive in their positions (Morin & Talbot, 2023; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2015). Thus, the perceptions of the local environment, including cultural and organizational practices, are an important boundary condition that affects the expatriates' adjustment and well-being (Lehtonen et al., 2023). It is, therefore, hypothesized that cultural intelligence and international experience will mediate the relationship between informal field-based learning and expatriate well-being (Li et al., 2024). Cultural intelligence and international experience are two factors that can help expatriates manage cultural differences, thus improving their adjustment and well-being (Chen, 2019). On the other hand, expatriates with low cultural intelligence or less international experience may face more difficulties adapting to the new environment and, therefore, may have lower adjustment levels and well-being (Bastida et al., 2023).

This study contributes to expatriate management, leadership, and cross-cultural research. First, although prior literature has examined the antecedents of expatriate adjustment and performance, the processes that may hinder adjustment have received comparatively little attention, especially in the context of informal learning. Thus, by exploring how informal field-based learning impacts expatriate well-being and how this association depends on cultural intelligence and international experience, the present study provides a more nuanced perspective on the adjustment process and the factors that enhance or hinder expatriate effectiveness. Second, although previous theoretical models have stressed the need for cultural adaptation of expatriates (e.g., Setti et al., 2022), a lack of research has addressed the role of informal learning in this process. The learning that happens naturally in the field during interactions and activities is a very important but neglected mode of knowledge transfer and learning in MNCs. Thus, by

including informal learning in the discussion of expatriate adjustment, the study contributes to understanding how expatriates learn the knowledge and skills essential for success in the new environment and effectively perform their tasks. Third, the part played by boundary conditions in expatriate adjustment is poorly understood, even though they are crucial in building good conceptual frameworks (Thatcher & Fisher, 2022). Most prior research on expatriate adjustment has investigated the role of personal characteristics, including cultural intelligence and personality, in the adjustment process. Still, this study takes it a notch higher by exploring the contextual variables—cultural intelligence and international experience—that can mediate the relationship between informal learning and expatriate adjustment. Thus, this research contributes to the literature by offering a more detailed picture of the expatriate adjustment process and providing suggestions for managers and organizations interested in enhancing their expatriate management programs. Last but not least, the study has important managerial implications for MNEs. Thus, the research provides practical recommendations to organizations on how to address the issues of informal learning, cultural intelligence, and international experience to enhance the readiness of expatriates for international assignments. Specifically, it is recommended that organizations ensure that expatriates undergo training that can help them develop cultural intelligence and provide them with international experience before their assignments. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of organizations cultivating conditions that support informal learning since this can be a significant determinant of expatriate performance in the foreign cultural environment.

### **Literature Review and Hypothesis Development**

#### **Expatriates' Informal Field-Based Learning and Employee Well-Being.**

Expatriates, individuals relocating to a foreign country for employment or other purposes, often face many challenges associated with cultural adaptation, linguistic barriers, and social integration. Such challenges can significantly impact their well-being, necessitating effective coping mechanisms for successful adjustment. This research explores the hypothesis that engaging in informal field-based learning positively influences expatriate well-being. Informal field-based learning refers to acquiring knowledge and skills through everyday experiences and interactions in the host country, as opposed to formal education or structured training programs. Expatriates often face numerous challenges when relocating to a new country, including cultural differences, language barriers, and social isolation. Informal field-based learning, which involves acquiring knowledge and skills through daily interactions and experiences rather than formal education or training, can mitigate these challenges. This type of learning allows expatriates to observe and participate in local customs, traditions, and social activities, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the host culture and enhancing their sense of belonging and integration (Fan et al., 2022; Li et al., 2018; Bauer & Taylor, 2001).

For several reasons, engaging in informal field-based learning can lead to higher well-being among expatriates. First, it fosters a sense of competence as expatriates become more adept at navigating their new environment and handling daily tasks. This sense of competence is a critical component of well-being, posited by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2024; Ryan et al., 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Second, informal learning experiences often involve social interactions, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness, thereby contributing to better mental health and emotional well-being (Fan et al., 2023; Black & Gregersen, 1991). Finally, by participating in local activities and customs, expatriates can develop meaningful relationships and a sense of community, which are essential for overall life satisfaction (Bierwiazzonek & Waldzus, 2016; Ward et al., 2001). Informal field-based learning IFBL encompasses various activities, including observing local customs, participating in social events, and interacting with locals in everyday situations. These activities facilitate cultural competence, language acquisition, and social integration, contributing to expatriate well-being. By immersing themselves in the local context, expatriates develop a deeper understanding of the host culture, which enhances their sense of belonging and overall life satisfaction. The theoretical framework guiding this study is the Self-

Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by (Ryan & Deci, 2024; Ryan et al., 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT posits that individuals' well-being is influenced by fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Informal field-based learning can facilitate fulfilling these needs by empowering expatriates to navigate their new environment autonomously, develop competence in cultural adaptation, and foster connections with the host community. Empirical research supports the positive impact of informal learning on expatriate well-being. For example, a study by Luring and Selmer (2018) found that expatriates who engaged in informal learning activities reported higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of stress. Similarly, (Takeuchi, 2010; Takeuchi et al., 2002) demonstrated that informal social interactions and cultural learning significantly contributed to expatriates' psychological adjustment and well-being. Therefore, based on theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, it is hypothesized that:

**H1:** *Expatriates who engage in informal field-based learning experience higher levels of well-being.*

### **The Mediating Role of Expatriate Adjustment**

Expatriate adjustment, the process by which individuals adapt to living and working in a foreign country, is critical in determining expatriate well-being. Informal field-based learning, characterized by acquiring knowledge and skills through daily interactions and experiences in the host country, influences expatriate adjustment. This hypothesis posits that expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between informal field-based learning and expatriate well-being. Adjustment to a new cultural environment is a multifaceted process that involves psychological, sociocultural, and work-related adaptation (Caldwell et al., 2024; Black et al., 1991). Informal field-based learning can significantly facilitate this adjustment by helping expatriates acquire the necessary cultural knowledge and social skills to function effectively in their new environment (Stoermer et al., 2020; Luring & Selmer, 2018; Selmer & Luring, 2011). Through informal learning, expatriates can better understand local norms, values, and behaviors, easing the transition and integration into the host culture.

The process of adjustment is closely linked to expatriate well-being. Successful adjustment reduces stress, increases job satisfaction, and improves mental health (Shaffer, 2020; Shaffer et al., 1999). When expatriates adjust well, they will likely feel more comfortable, confident, and content in their new surroundings, contributing to their well-being (Caligiuri, 2021; Caligiuri, 2000). Conversely, poor adjustment can result in frustration, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, negatively impacting well-being (Hechanova & Caringal-Go, 2018; Hechanova et al., 2003). Research indicates that adjustment mediates the relationship between learning and well-being. For instance, (Uddin et al., 2020; Davies & Froese, 2019; Stoermer, 2018; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005) found that expatriates' cultural adjustment mediated the relationship between their experiences in the host country and their psychological well-being. This suggests that informal learning enhances well-being primarily by improving expatriates' adjustment to their new environment. Therefore, it is proposed the following hypothesis:

**H2:** *Expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between informal field-based learning and well-being.*

### **Moderating Role of International Experience**

International experience plays a crucial role in shaping expatriates' ability to adapt to new environments and navigate cross-cultural challenges. Building upon the foundation of informal field-based learning, this hypothesis proposes that the relationship between informal learning and expatriate adjustment is amplified for individuals with extensive international experience. This hypothesis explores the moderating effect of international experience on the relationship between informal field-based learning and expatriate adjustment. International experience refers to the extent of an expatriate's previous exposure to foreign cultures and international assignments. Expatriates with extensive international experience are likely to have developed a range of skills and competencies that facilitate their adjustment to new cultural environments

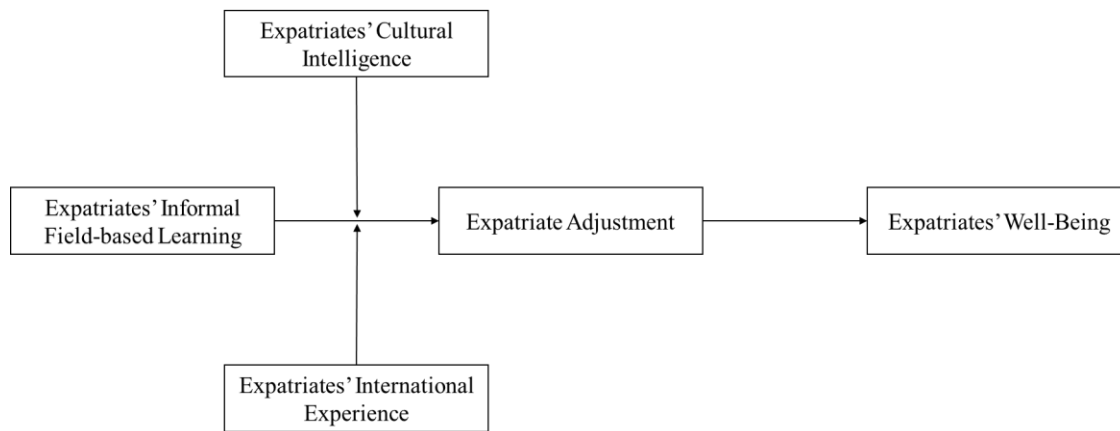
(Takeuchi et al., 2019; Takeuchi et al., 2005). These skills include cultural awareness, adaptability, and the ability to manage uncertainty and ambiguity (Crowne, 2019; Crowne, 2008). Experienced expatriates are better positioned to utilize informal field-based learning opportunities effectively. They are more likely to recognize and interpret cultural cues accurately and to apply their previous experiences to new contexts (Pidduck et al., 2022; Shaffer et al., 2006). This accumulated knowledge and expertise can enhance their ability to adjust to the host culture, as they can draw on past successes and lessons learned from previous assignments. According to SDT, individuals are motivated to engage in activities that satisfy their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Expatriates with greater international experience are likely to have developed a strong sense of competence in navigating diverse cultural environments and a greater capacity for autonomy in their adaptation processes. Additionally, their past experiences may have facilitated the development of meaningful relationships across cultures, fulfilling their need for relatedness. Empirical studies support the moderating role of international experience. For example, a study by (Ott et al., 2018; Firth et al., 2014) found that expatriates with prior international experience adjusted more quickly and effectively to new assignments. Similarly, Waxin, Brewster, and Ashill (2019) and Waxin (2004) demonstrated that international experience positively influenced expatriates' cultural adjustment. Based on these insights, it is hypothesized that:

**H3a:** *Expatriates with greater international experience strengthen the positive relationship between informal field-based learning and expatriate adjustment.*

### **Moderating Role of Expatriates' Cultural Intelligence**

Cultural intelligence (CQ), the ability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings, is a critical factor influencing expatriate adaptation. This hypothesis proposes that expatriates with higher levels of cultural intelligence amplify the positive relationship between informal field-based learning and expatriate adjustment. By leveraging their cultural knowledge, mindfulness, and adaptability, culturally intelligent expatriates are better equipped to capitalize on informal learning experiences, thereby enhancing their adjustment to the host country. CQ is the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Yaba & Çetin, 2024; Paraíso et al., 2022; Earley & Ang, 2003). It encompasses cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions, enabling individuals to understand, adapt, and perform successfully in different cultural contexts (Wang & Goh, 2020; Ang et al., 2007). High CQ allows expatriates to interpret unfamiliar cultural behaviors accurately, engage in culturally appropriate interactions, and adapt their behavior to suit different cultural norms (Thomas et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2008). While direct empirical research addressing this hypothesis may be limited, existing literature supports its theoretical underpinnings. Studies have demonstrated the positive impact of cultural intelligence on expatriate adjustment (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003) and the effectiveness of informal learning in facilitating cross-cultural adaptation (Takeuchi, 2021; Wang & Goh, 2020, Luring, & Selmer, 2018; Takeuchi et al., 2002). Integrating these insights within the framework of SDT, it is posited that expatriates with higher cultural intelligence are more likely to engage autonomously in informal learning activities, leading to enhanced adjustment outcomes. Expatriates with high cultural intelligence are more likely to benefit from informal field-based learning because they can better decode and integrate cultural information. Their heightened awareness and understanding of cultural differences enable them to learn more effectively from their surroundings and interactions (Jiang et al., 2018; Ng et al., 2009). This, in turn, facilitates their adjustment to the host culture, as they can apply their cultural insights to navigate social and professional environments more adeptly. Research supports the moderating effect of CQ on the relationship between learning and adjustment. For instance, studies by Ott & Michailova (2018), Azevedo (2018), Malek & Budhwar (2013), and Ang et al. (2007) found that expatriates with higher CQ adjusted more successfully to their host cultures. These findings suggest that CQ enhances the impact of informal learning on adjustment. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H3b:** *Expatriates with higher cultural intelligence strengthen the positive relationship between informal field-based learning and expatriate adjustment.*



**Figure 1:** Proposed research framework

**Methods**

**Research Design**

This quantitative study employed a cross-sectional design to investigate the relationships between expatriate adjustment, cultural intelligence, and their effects on employee performance and well-being in a multinational context (figure 1). Data collection occurred at one point in time, consistent with the study's cross-sectional nature. The data was gathered from Chinese expatriates employed by Sinosteel Construction & Development Co. Ltda in Bolivia. A survey methodology was utilized, with the questionnaire developed in English and subsequently translated into Chinese to accommodate participants' linguistic needs. This causal study aimed to test hypotheses derived from existing theory and literature using statistical methods such as SPSS with Hayes' Process Macro. Minimal researcher interference was ensured throughout the process. The survey was administered during regular work hours without disrupting the participants' routines. Prior studies have demonstrated the efficacy of this approach in similar contexts (Caprar et al., 2022; Irshad & Bashir, 2020; Naseer et al., 2020; Qasim et al., 2022). The study was conducted in a natural, non-contrived setting without environmental manipulation.

**Participants and Procedures**

This study's participants, alongside their local colleagues, included full-time Chinese expatriates working in Bolivia for Sinosteel Construction & Development Co. Ltda. The research population consisted of both Chinese expatriates and local Bolivian employees. Participants were selected using a random sampling technique to ensure the sample was representative. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire distributed during regular work hours. Participation was voluntary, with guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity.

**Measures**

All variables in this study, both at the individual and organizational levels, were measured using established scales. Unless noted otherwise, responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Expatriates' Informal Field-Based Learning:** IFBL was measured employing a 9-item scale adapted from Omarbek-Nurbavliyev et al. (2022) and Wolters, Simons, & Volet (2000), which captures the extent to which expatriates engage in informal learning activities in the field.

**Expatriates' Cultural Intelligence: ECQ** was rated using a 20-item scale developed by Ang et al. (2007), which assesses the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral attributes of an individual's CQ.

**Expatriates' Adjustment: EA** Adjustment was rated using a 7-item scale developed by Black and Stephens (1989) and further refined by Anderson et al. (2016), which weighs the degree of expatriates' psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

**Expatriates' International Experience: EIE** For international experience, the study used a scale of Lee and Sukoco (2010), which helped us to evaluate. The scale was a 7-item scale that examined prior overseas assignments and their impact on expatriates' adaptability.

**Expatriates' Well-Being: EWB** An 18-item scale for Well-being from Ryff and Keyes (1995) was used. This scale captures multiple dimensions of psychological well-being, including self-acceptance, positive relations, and purpose in life.

**Control variables**

The study thoroughly examined the demographic variables, including gender, age, education, experience, and position, about the study variables. However, only the positions of employees exhibited significant differences. It was found that the position of employees may play a facilitating role in their adjustment within the organization (Kim, 2024; Sparrow et al., 2016).

**Data Analysis Methods**

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, following a rigorous process to ensure the accuracy and validity of the results. Discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) method, comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) to shared variances, confirming that constructs were distinct. To address common method bias, we conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and applied Harman's single-factor test, which indicated no significant influence of common method variance on the findings. Collinearity diagnostics were also performed to check for multicollinearity among variables, ensuring the precision of the regression analyses. Additionally, one-way ANOVA was used to compare variances within and between groups, verifying homogeneity. Descriptive and correlational analyses provided a detailed overview of the data. To test the hypotheses, Hayes' process macro was employed, which facilitated the exploration of direct, mediated, and moderated effects within the model, enabling a deeper understanding of the complex relationships in the study.

**Table 1: Scale, Source, Sample items and Reliability**

Variables	Source	Items	Sample Item	Reliability
IFBL	Van Hout-Wolters, Simons, & Volet (2000).	9	I learn from my own experiences.	.90
CQ	Ang et al. (2007).	20	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.	.83
EIE	Lee and Sukoco (2010).	7	I have traveled to different countries for business purposes.	.85
EA	Black and Stephens (1989); Anderson et al. (2016).	7	I feel comfortable in this country.	.89
EWB	Ryff and Keyes (1995).	18	I like most aspects of my personality.	.95

N=273, IFBL= Expatriates' informal field-based Learning, CQ= Cultural Intelligence, EA= expatriate adjustment, EIE= Expatriates' international experience, EWB= Employee well-being.

**Scales and their Reliabilities  
Skewness and Kurtosis**

**Table 2: Skewness and Kurtosis**

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Expatriates' Informal Field-based Learning	.328	-.218
Cultural Intelligence	.459	.131
Expatriate Adjustment	.243	.046
Expatriates' International Experience	.136	.067
Employee Well-Being	.336	.177

N=273

**Demographic Characteristics**

**Table 3: Demographic Characteristics**

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	161	59
Female	112	41
<b>Education</b>		
SSC	103	37.7
HSC	47	17.2
Bachelor's Degree	80	29.3
Master's Degree	43	15.8
<b>Experience</b>		
Less than 1 year	95	34.8
1-5 years	39	14.3
6-11 years	58	21.2
12-17 years	27	9.9
Above 18 years	54	19.8
<b>Position</b>		
Manager	89	32.6
First-line Manager	86	31.5
Middle Manager	57	20.9
Top Manager	41	15.0

**One-Way ANOVA**

The One-Way ANOVA results provide valuable information about the potential impact of demographic factors on expatriate adjustment and employee well-being in the sampled population. Gender analysis shows no significant differences in expatriate adjustment ( $F = 1.02, p = .31$ ) or employee well-being ( $F = .02, p = .88$ ). Similarly, age is not a significant predictor of expatriate adjustment ( $F = 0.82, p = .74$ ) or employee well-being ( $F = 1.25, p = .16$ ). Education level does not show a significant relationship with expatriate adjustment ( $F = .77, p = .51$ ) or employee well-being ( $F = 1.51, p = .21$ ). Similarly, years of experience have no significant effect on expatriate adjustment ( $F = .35, p = .84$ ) or employee well-being ( $F = 1.53, p = .19$ ). However, positional roles within the organizational hierarchy produce notable differences, with position having a significant effect on expatriate adjustment ( $F = 2.84, p = .03$ ). However, there are no significant differences in employee well-being across positions ( $F = .68, p = .56$ ). These findings highlight the nuanced impact of demographic variables on expatriate adjustment and employee well-being, with organizational position emerging as a particularly important factor in determining expatriate adjustment outcomes.

**Results**

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Gender	1	2	1.41	.49
Age	22	58	38.39	9.82
Education	1	4	2.23	1.11
Experience	1	5	2.66	1.52
Position	1	4	2.18	1.05
Expatriates' Informal Field-Based Learning	1	7	5.14	.82
Cultural Intelligence	1	7	4.87	.76
Expatriate Adjustment	1	7	5.08	.93
Expatriates' International Experience	1	7	5.01	.92
Employee Well-Being	1	7	5.13	.75



**Correlations Analysis**

IFBL shows a significant positive correlation with EA ( $r = 0.63, p < 0.01$ ) and a positive correlation with EWB ( $r = 0.27, p < 0.01$ ). CQ demonstrates a significant positive correlation with IFBL ( $r = 0.15, p < 0.05$ ) and a positive correlation with EA ( $r = 0.14, p < 0.05$ ). EIE exhibits a significant

**Table Error! No text of specified style in document.: Correlations Analysis**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 IFBL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 CQ	.15*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3 EIE	.17**	.07	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4 EA	.63**	.14*	.22**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5 EWB	.27**	.03	.12*	.21**	-	-	-	-	-	-
6 Gender	.01	-.01	-.02	-.06	.01	-	-	-	-	-
7 Age	.09	-.02	.06	.08	-.08	.03	-	-	-	-
8 Position	.11	.00	.11	.17**	.04	-.09	.20**	-	-	-
9 Education	-.02	-.04	-.08	-.03	.10	-.09	-.51**	-.16**	-	-
10 Tenure	.00	-.03	.01	.03	.07	-.06	.22**	.13	-.08	-

N = 273, \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

IFBL= Expatriates' informal field-based Learning, CQ= Cultural Intelligence, EA= expatriate adjustment, EIE= Expatriates' international experience, EWB= Employee well-being.

positive correlation with EA ( $r = 0.21, p < 0.01$ ) and a positive correlation with IFBL ( $r = 0.173, p < 0.01$ ). All the demographic variables were included in the correlations analysis because some of them showed effects in ANOVA, but only the positions of employees were in positive correlation with the EA.

**Regression Analysis**

**Direct Effects of IFBL**

**Table 6: Direct Effects of IFBL**

Path	Coefficient	SE	t	P
H 1 IFBL → EA	.68**	.05	12.58	.00
IFBL → EWB	.21**	.07	3.06	.00

IFBL= Expatriates' informal field-based learning, EA= expatriate adjustment, EWB= Employee well-being.

The regression analysis was carried out using the process, and Hayes Model 9 revealed the direct effects of key variables, shedding light on the relationships within the studied model. The path coefficient between informal field-based Learning (IFBL) and expatriate adjustment (EA) is significant ( $\beta = .68, p < .001$ ), indicating a strong positive relationship. This implies that expatriates with higher levels of informal field-based learning adjust better in their respective roles. Furthermore, the path coefficient between expatriates' informal field-based Learning and employee well-being (EWB) is significant ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ).

**Table 7: Mediation Analysis**

(95% bias-corrected confidence interval method)				
Indirect Effect	Effect	SE	LL	UL
H2: IFBL → EA → EWB	.095**	.031	.061	.293

N = 273, IFBL= informal field-based learning, EA= Expatriate adjustment, EWB= expatriate well-being

LL lower limit, UL upper limit, SE standard error

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**The mediating role of Expatriate Adjustment**

It has been conducted a mediation analysis using a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval method to examine the indirect effect of informal field-based Learning (IFBL) on expatriate well-being (EWB) through expatriate adjustment (EA).

**Indirect Effect (IFBL -> EA -> EWB):** The indirect effect was 0.095. This effect was statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ), meaning that informal field-based learning positively influences expatriate well-being through its impact on expatriate adjustment.

**Moderation Results**

**Table 8: Moderation Analysis**

		Moderator: Cultural Intelligence			
		$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	<i>S.E</i>	<i>t</i>
	Constant		4.99**	.04	12.37
	CQ → EA		.161*	.04	2.49
<b>H 3b</b>	IFBL x CQ →EA		.093	.06	1.49

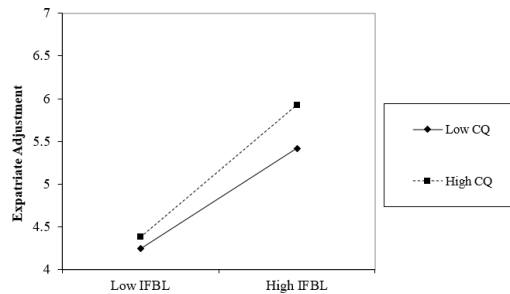
		Moderator: EIE			
		$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	<i>S.E</i>	<i>T</i>
	Constant		4.99	.04	12.37
	EIE →EA		.10*	.04	2.16
<b>H 3a</b>	IFBL x EIE →EA		.17**	.04	2.92
	$\Delta R^2$ due to interaction term	.02**			

N = 273 \* p<.05, p\*\*<.01

IFBL= Expatriates’ informal field-based Learning, CQ= Cultural Intelligence, EA= expatriate adjustment, EIE= Expatriates’ international experience, EWB= Employee well-being.

**Moderating role of CQ**

Table 8 shows the findings of the moderation analysis. Model 9 of the process macros were used to investigate the moderating effects of cultural intelligence and expatriate, international experience on the link between IFBL and expatriate adjustment. The advantage of process macros for moderation analysis is the display of slope tests that indicate the association between two variables at high, moderate, and low moderator levels (presented in figure 2). Moderation analysis was performed using the mean-centering approach for independent and moderator variables. The interaction between IFBL and cultural intelligence on expatriate adjustment was positive and significant ( $\beta = .093$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Furthermore, the slope test shows that the association expected between IFBL and expatriate adjustment is insignificant. In addition, a mod graph was created to test the direction of the moderating effect, which visually demonstrates the association between IFBL and expatriate adjustment. As a result, the interactive effect, slope test, and mod graph results did not support Hypothesis 3b.

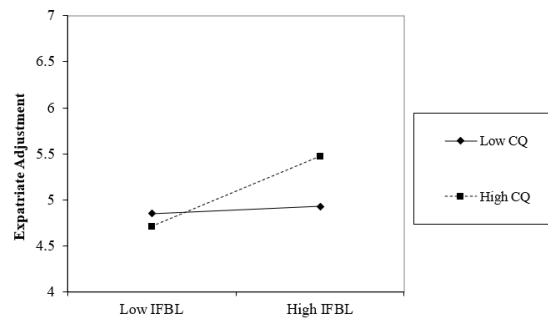


**Figure 2.** Slope tests (Moderation Analysis of Cultural Intelligence on the Relationship Between Informal Field-Based Learning (IFBL) and Expatriate Adjustment (EA))

**Moderating role of EIE**

To examine the moderating effect of EIE on the relationship between IFBL and EA, the Hayes process macros model 9 was utilized for testing. Before the moderating effect analysis, the average values of IFBL and EIE have been adjusted to be centered. The study found a significant interactive effect of EIE on EA with a beta coefficient of 0.17 and a p-value of less than 0.01. The additional variance resulting from the combined impact of IFBL and EIE was also statistically significant ( $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The slope test results indicate that the impact of IFBL on EA is relatively weak when the moderating variable (EIE) has a low value but becomes stronger when the moderator value is high. In addition, a modular graph was computed to visually depict the impact of IFBL on EA at both high and low levels of EIE. The graph illustrating the relationship between IFBL and EA showed a greater slope at high EIE values than at low EIE values (refer to Figure 3). Thus, the interactive effect, slope test, and mod graph results strongly support the

acceptance of Hypothesis 3a, which states that EIE moderates the relationship between IFBL and EA. Specifically, the relationship will be stronger for individuals with high EIE than those with low EIE.



**Figure 3:** Slope tests (Moderating Effect of Expatriate International Experience (EIE) on the Relationship Between Informal Field-Based Learning (IFBL) and Expatriate Adjustment (EA))

### Discussion

The results of this research provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of IFBL and its effects on expatriate adjustment and well-being. The significant relationship between IFBL and EA underscores the pivotal role that informal Learning plays in facilitating expatriates' adaptation to new environments. This strong positive relationship, which aligns with previous literature emphasizing the importance of experiential and contextual learning for expatriates (Wolfson et al., 2018; Han et al., 2022), suggests that expatriates who engage more in informal learning activities tend to adjust better. Furthermore, the significant relationship between IFBL and EWB highlights that informal learning not only aids in adjustment but also directly contributes to the overall well-being of expatriates. This finding is critical as it extends the understanding of IFBL beyond functional adaptation to encompass broader psychological and emotional well-being, reinforcing the multifaceted benefits of informal learning activities (Bastida et al., 2023).

The mediation analysis reveals that EA significantly mediates the relationship between IFBL and EWB. This indicates that part of the positive impact of IFBL on EWB operates through its enhancement of EA. This mediating role of EA is consistent with adjustment theories, which postulate that well-adjusted individuals are more likely to experience higher levels of well-being (Caligiuri, 2000; Black & Gregersen, 1991). Although the interaction between IFBL and CQ was positive, it was not statistically significant, and the slope tests did not support the expected moderation effect. This finding aligns with recent research suggesting that the direct benefits of IFBL on EA may be so substantial that they overshadow the potential moderating influence of CQ (Morin & Talbot, 2023). Similar studies have also found that while CQ is beneficial, its impact can be less pronounced when the primary intervention, such as IFBL, is highly effective on its own (Han et al., 2022; Wolfson et al., 2018). This suggests that CQ may not amplify the benefits of IFBL on EA as initially hypothesized, possibly due to the already strong direct effect of IFBL. Conversely, EIE showed a significant moderating effect on the relationship between IFBL and EA. The positive impact of IFBL on EA was more pronounced at higher levels of EIE, supporting the hypothesis that expatriates with more international experience leverage informal learning more effectively to enhance their adjustment. This finding is consistent with literature indicating that prior international experience equips expatriates with better coping mechanisms and learning strategies, thereby facilitating their adjustment (Selmer, 2022; Puck et al., 2016). In summary, the results affirm the critical role of IFBL in promoting adjustment and well-being among expatriates, with EA serving as a key mediator. This underscores the importance and relevance of this research. While CQ's moderating role was not supported, EIE significantly enhances the IFBL-EA relationship, highlighting the value of accumulated international experience.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The results of this research enrich the body of knowledge on expatriate management and informal learning by providing insights into the processes of expatriates' adaptation and psychological functioning. The correlation between IFBL and EA supports the theoretical importance of experiential learning frameworks in cross-cultural contexts. This study builds on the work of Kolb (1984) and Black and Gregersen (1991) by asserting that informal learning is as important as formal training in helping expatriates adapt. The substantial mediation role of EA in the IFBL-expatriates' EWB relationship also supports adjustment theories that assert that adjustment improves the general well-being of people (Caligiuri, 2000). These findings imply that future theoretical frameworks on expatriation should include informal learning as a significant process that enhances functional and psychological adjustment. Furthermore, the moderating effect of expatriates' international experience (EIE) in the IFBL-EA relationship brings a new perspective to the impact of prior exposure to international environments on learning effectiveness. This moderating effect builds on the discussion of expatriates' learning and adjustment by proposing that prior international experience enhances the relationship between learning and adjustment (Shaffer et al., 1999; Kraimer et al., 2001). Contrary to expectations, the non-significant moderating effect of CQ challenges the assumption that CQ always enhances adjustment-related outcomes (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003). This finding implies that under some conditions, for instance, when informal learning is high, CQ may be less effective, thus pointing out the need for future research to examine the moderating conditions under which CQ operates.

### **Practical Implications**

In terms of application, this research provides useful information for MNEs and HR professionals who want to enhance the effectiveness of their expatriate management. The strong positive correlation between IFBL and EA suggests that organizations should encourage and support using informal learning tools like job swaps, mentoring, and cross-cultural interactions as part of their expatriate support frameworks. These initiatives will likely enhance faster adaptation and better performance in the host countries. Furthermore, since IFBL is positively related to EWB, organizations should understand that informal learning has psychological advantages and should offer resources that would help expatriates participate in the cultural activities of the host country, thus enhancing their psychological well-being. The moderating effect of EIE highlights that expatriates with prior international experience are better positioned to benefit from informal learning opportunities. As such, HR practitioners might consider tailoring learning interventions based on employees' prior international exposure, offering more intensive cultural preparation for those with less experience. While CQ did not moderate the relationship as expected, it remains an important skill set, and organizations should still invest in cultural intelligence training, particularly for expatriates entering culturally diverse environments where formal learning may be limited.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Despite the valuable contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes definitive causal inferences, and future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to validate the causal relationships between IFBL, EA, and EWB. Longitudinal studies could capture the dynamic nature of adjustment and well-being over time, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how informal learning evolves throughout the expatriate assignment. Second, the non-significant moderating effect of CQ warrants further investigation. CQ may interact with variables not accounted for in this study, such as personality traits or cultural distance. Future research should explore these additional moderating factors to understand better when and how CQ facilitates expatriate adjustment. Third, this study focused on Chinese expatriates in Bolivia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should replicate this study across diverse cultural contexts to examine whether the relationships hold in different expatriate populations and host countries.

Comparative studies involving expatriates from different nationalities and regions would enhance the external validity of the findings.

Finally, future research should explore additional mediators beyond EA that could explain the IFBL-EWB relationship. Variables such as job satisfaction, work engagement, or cross-cultural competence might provide further insights into how informal learning contributes to well-being in expatriate contexts.

## Conclusion

In summary, this study reinforces the importance of IFBL in promoting expatriate adjustment and well-being, with expatriate adjustment playing a critical mediating role. The moderating effect of international experience suggests that prior exposure enhances the efficacy of informal learning, while the unexpected findings regarding cultural intelligence call for further exploration. These findings have theoretical and practical implications, suggesting that informal learning is vital to expatriate success and should be incorporated into organizational support systems. Future research should build on these insights by exploring additional moderators, mediators, and cultural contexts to deepen the understanding of expatriate adaptation and well-being.

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