



RESEARCH SUMMARY:

Decision Making Strategies and Orientations to Problem Solving in Cultural Transition

What were the goals of the study?

This study is part of a larger project that aims to understand how migrants deal with difficulties in their everyday life. When moving to another country people face a lot of challenges during their transition. New cultural expectations drive immigrants to seek information about their environment and the rules of the society, to examine their identity as well as to explore alternative options in a new culture. In some cases, immigrants also experience a conflict or crisis over their identity. Previous research has shown that when people have to deal with identity issues, they apply different strategies to solve problems, make decisions and explore their environment.

The purpose of this study was twofold. On one hand, we wanted to explore the main strategies that migrants apply in conflicting situations and describe the characteristics of these orientations to problem solving behavior. On the other hand, we also aimed at the validation of our measurement. When psychologists use an instrument with a specific group, it is important to ensure that it is an accurate and valid measure of the researched construct. One way of doing this is to compare the measure to more established tests and to related concepts. Therefore, in this study we used a variety of tests, including measures of ethnic identity conflict, rational and intuitive decision-making, attitude toward social desirability, and the need for closure. We expected that different orientations – that we also call as identity styles – would show a specific pattern and relationship with the abovementioned measures.

What are the main results of the study?

In our data analysis we could identify five main orientations to problem solving behavior. When it comes to conflicting situations, some migrants try to gain as much information about the host country as possible and actively seek contact with locals. When they face difficulties or conflicting situations they talk to other people and try to understand their point of view before they make decisions. We call this type as Informational Identity Style. Those who score high on informational style tend to make decisions on a rational basis and they are characterized by a high level of decisiveness.

Others prefer to stick to their own values and behave according to the norms of their heritage culture. They feel more confident and comfortable if they can proceed and behave in accordance to the norms and values of their home country. They also have a need for order and predictability in their life. In contrast, there are migrants who try to adapt the norms and rules of the host society. They find it better to deal with conflicting situations by following the local norms. It does not mean the rejection of their culture of origin; they just feel more secured and comfortable in social



interactions if they apply the rules of the host country. These two types are called Normative Orientation Toward the Country of Origin and Normative Orientation Toward the Host Society.

The forth type is a General Normative Orientation. People who are generally normative like to make their own decisions and prefer to stick to them. They tend to make intuitive decisions and rely on their gut feelings. Their norms and values do not necessarily relate to either the home or the host country, but they have a definite set of beliefs and they solve problems based on their own rules.

Finally, we identified a group of people who try to delay acting as long as possible and avoid conflicting situations with locals. They think it is better to be flexible and change their behavior from situation to situation in order to avoid conflict. This orientation is called Diffuse-Avoidant Identity Style. Those who prefer this strategy have a need for order, predictability as well as stability.

Although we use all these strategies throughout our lifespan, research shows that everyone has a dominant orientation to problem solving behavior. Depending on the situation, each of these strategies might be adaptive. For instance, if someone stays only for a limited time in the country, it could be a good strategy avoiding conflict and trying to have a good time. However, for those who want to settle into the host society, it is inevitable to face difficulties and conflicting situations, therefore it might be a better strategy to gain information about the norms and rules of the society and seek contact with locals. However, to test these assumptions, more research needs to be done. In our second study we will look at how specific identity strategies relate to psychological outcomes (such as wellbeing) and socio-cultural adjustment.

In this study both research objectives have been achieved; and now we can be confident that the modified version of the Identity Style Inventory is a reliable measure for culturally diverse research participants, including immigrants.

Thank you very much for your help and your contribution to our research!

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