



HONEYMOON



ADAPTATION & ACCEPTANCE

THE CULTURAL ADAPTATION CURVE: DIVING INTO YOUR NEW CULTURE



FRUSTRATION

1 HONEYMOON



When you are in your own culture or a familiar environment, you are competent in your ability to communicate and accomplish the large and small tasks of everyday living.

You speak the language, you know where to buy the freshest vegetables, you have your favorite hairdresser or barber, and you know how to get around. This competence inspires confidence, which you may not even acknowledge because you just do what you do.

As you continue to adjust to your new location, even if you're a seasoned traveler and have prepared extensively for life in this new culture, you are likely to move through the ups and downs of culture shock. At first everything seems new and different. The first step of adapting to a new culture is called the **Honeymoon** phase.

You may be excited by the new culture as you are exposed to many new people, sights, and opportunities, similar to being a visitor. You are motivated to learn and feel relatively confident in your abilities to adapt successfully to your new environment. This stage can last a relatively long time if you are adapting easily and enjoying the process. It can also last a relatively short time if your adaptation is difficult or slow.

2 FRUSTRATION

After a while, language and cultural barriers are frustrating and you may long for the familiar.

Your opinion of the new culture and what it has to offer may drastically dip. Things can seem difficult and daily interactions can turn into a burden.

This is the second phase of culture shock: **Frustration.**

You begin to feel as though you have lost all your competence in navigating everyday life, and this may cause a loss of confidence. You are no longer just a tourist but rather a local resident. You are reduced to speaking and gesturing like a small child, you can't find your favorite ingredients, you desperately need a haircut, and you have no idea how to navigate a city without street signs and with ceaseless traffic.



This stage can be relatively short if the cultural differences between your home and host culture are not that great or if you adapt easily. It can also be relatively long if the cultural divide is vast, if you are less flexible than you thought, or if you encounter some major unforeseen setbacks.

2 FRUSTRATION

During the low points, try your best to refrain from casting a negative light on everything—even when things are at their worst and you're thinking to yourself that there couldn't be a more wrong way to do things. Just because people do things differently doesn't mean that they're inherently wrong, even though you feel that they are. Try not to let your preferences govern how you feel and work to adapt. Empathy and keeping things in perspective can go a long way.

You can take some proactive steps to accelerate the development of your competence and confidence. Acquire the basics of the local language. Learn about the culture through reading and visiting local sights. Reach out to people to ask for help and develop new friendships. Maintain a healthy lifestyle through good diet, exercise, and sleep. Focus on the positive, set small, attainable goals, and celebrate even the small successes. Step by step, you will acquire more competence and greater confidence, and a sense of control will follow.

3 ADAPTATION & ACCEPTANCE

You are in the **Adaptation** phase when frustrations subside as your competence in the local culture grows. You have adapted in ways that make sense for you. You have created a home, are managing daily life, and have made new friends, all serving to help you regain some of your confidence. While you still experience ups and downs, they are now more like the fluctuations of everyday life.

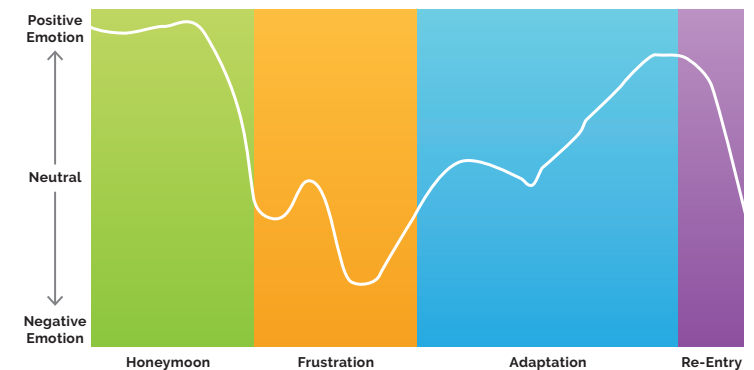
In the **Acceptance** phase, you have created a way to live a well-balanced life. While there may be aspects of the local culture that you will never accept or understand, you have found a rhythm and a routine that enable you to feel relatively balanced and in control.



4 OVER TIME

In reality, when you're adapting to a new culture the curve is one that contains more ups and downs throughout the stages and there is also a readjustment phase when you return to your home culture. Whenever you're adjusting you'll have bumps in the road. Each time you go through a period of adjustment, whether to a new culture or back to your home culture, the hope is that the depth and duration of each downturn will be less profound.

Here's a more true to life representation of ups and downs of cultural adaptation:



Keep in mind that when you're traveling with others they may not be facing the same issues you are or moving through the culture shock cycle at the same pace you are. Each individual moves through the different stages of adaptation at their own pace. Try to remain empathetic as you help each other along.