

# Challenges faced by foreign professionals when acculturating in the Irish professional workplace

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## **Abstract**

### **Challenges faced by foreign professionals when acculturating in the Irish professional workplace by Daniela Moctezuma**

Foreign professionals have arrived in Ireland, creating a force from the diversity that can enrich organizations, but at the same time, bring significant challenges to Human Resources. This study aims to analyze the challenges and strategies experienced by foreign professionals when facing the acculturation process in the Irish workplace. The study draws on Berry's (1997) theoretical framework, which distinguishes between integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, to explore how cultural identity, work norms, and external contextual factors interact in professional and social adaptation.

A qualitative research approach was adopted, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with six foreign professionals from Italy, France, Brazil, Mexico, and Guadeloupe, working in sectors such as technology, finance, construction, education, and supply chain. Participants were recruited through personal networks, and interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a hybrid coding approach that combined deductive methods from the theoretical framework with emerging themes identified inductively from their experiences.

This research contributes to the literature by highlighting the context-dependent and nature of acculturation strategies among skilled migrants in Ireland, and by focusing on the interaction between inclusivity at work, language acquisition, and external socioeconomic conditions. Based on the findings, recommendations will be proposed for employers and policymakers, such as proactively promoting language learning, creating structured opportunities for social inclusion, and addressing non-work-related barriers that influence the overall experience of migrants, as well as improving work performance and achieving better results for the company.

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**Thesis supervisor:** David Hurley

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<b>Deepl Translator</b>	Translate unknown words from my native language to English.	<a href="https://deepl.com/en/translator">https://deepl.com/en/translator</a>
<b>GoodTape</b>	For transcribing the recorded interviews.	<a href="https://goodtape.io">https://goodtape.io</a>

### Description of AI Usage

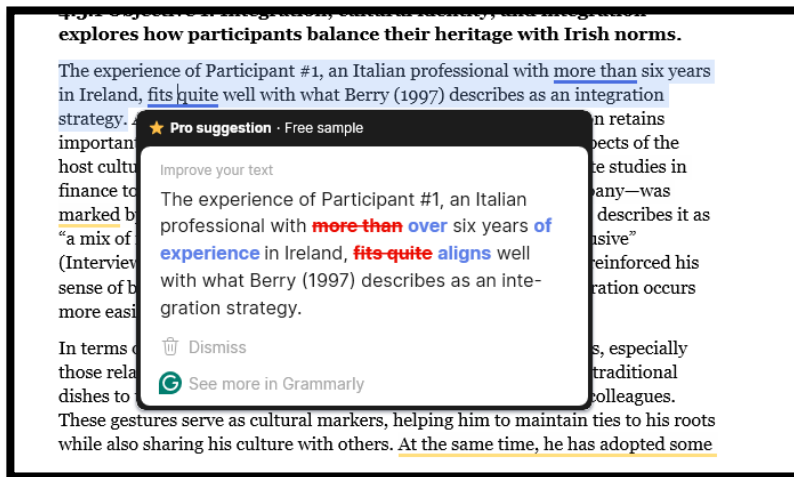
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Chat GPT	
Grammarly was used to correct some grammar mistakes, mainly punctuation and prepositions	
TO	Change preposition

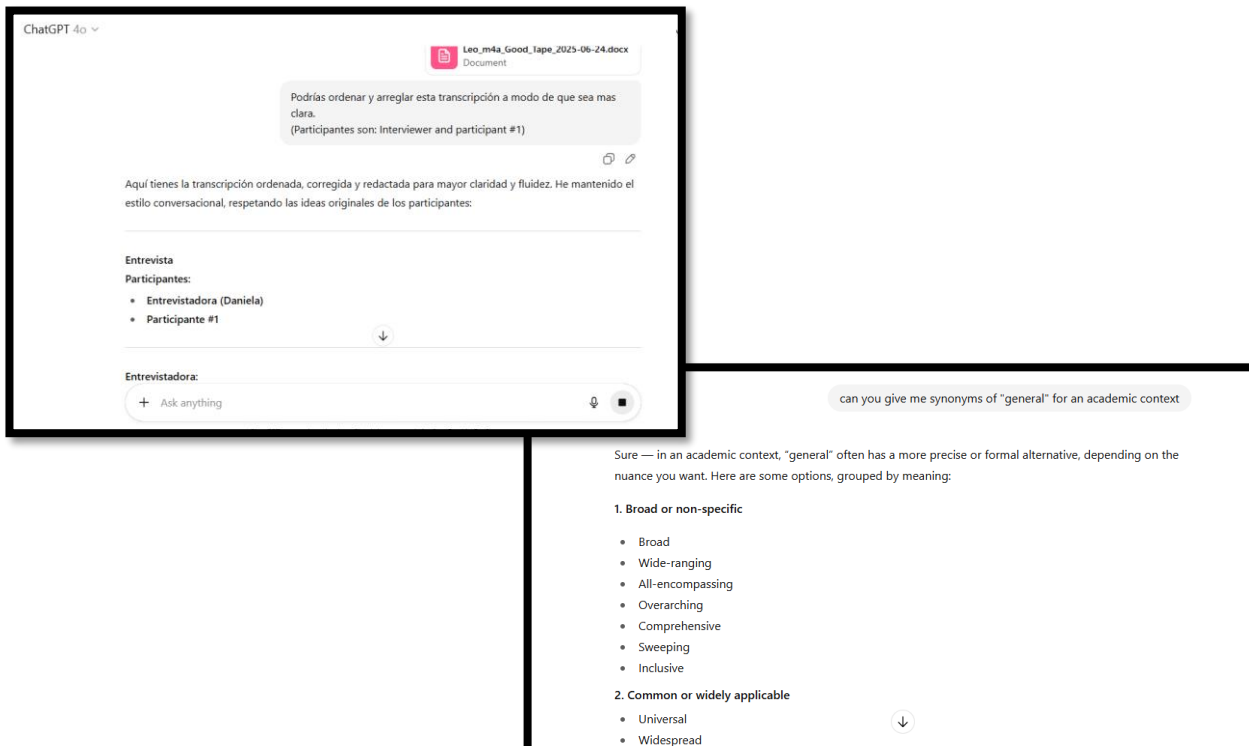
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### Additional Evidence:



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## **CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH TOPIC**

### **1.1 Background to Study**

Globalization has transformed economies and workplaces, giving rise to increasingly multicultural teams and a growing demand for intercultural skills (Gonzalez, 2016; Friedman, 2006). Ireland, historically a country of emigrants, has in recent years become a destination for international talent thanks to sustained economic growth, foreign direct investment, and tight labor market conditions. According to the Central Statistics Office, at least 140,000 people moved to Ireland in April 2024. And, at the end of 2024, employment stood at around 2.8 million people, and unemployment was close to historic lows, which in practice reflects a situation of “full employment” (CSO, 2025).

There are several reasons for this: sustained economic growth, the arrival of foreign investment, and labor shortages in certain sectors (O'Hagan & O'Toole, 2017). This change has brought opportunities but also challenges. On the one hand, foreign professionals bring new ideas and energy; on the other, they face the real challenge of adapting to a different work culture, learning nuances in communication, building trust, and achieving a sense of belonging (Niehoff & Maciocha, 2008).

While diversity can boost creativity and performance (Hofhuis et al., 2015; Raewf and Mahmood, 2021), the acculturation process is not without its difficulties: language, social integration, and perceived discrimination can affect both well-being and productivity (Berry, 1997, 2005; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). In Ireland, there are also structural pressures that complicate the migration experience, such as housing shortages and high living costs, which have become significant obstacles even when working conditions are good.

## **1.2 Gaps in Literature**

Although the Irish labor market and migration trends have been studied (O'Hagan & O'Toole, 2017; Niehoff & Maciocha, 2008), there is little qualitative research specifically focusing on the acculturation experiences of highly skilled foreign professionals in Irish professional sectors. Much of this work has focused on low-skilled migration or international students (Ma et al., 2020), leaving a significant gap in our understanding of how professionals integrate into work environments that impose high cultural expectations and performance standards.

### **1.2.1 External acculturation factors**

On the other hand, although Berry's (1997) acculturation model has been widely applied in international contexts, few studies conducted in Ireland analyze the interaction between organizational culture, language proficiency, and socioeconomic factors such as housing availability and cost of living, despite the fact that these challenges are frequently mentioned by migrants (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Furthermore, the specific labor dynamics of each sector have barely been explored, since much of the literature tends to treat the migrant experience as a homogeneous phenomenon, ignoring the differences that may exist between industries such as information technology, construction, finance, or education.

### **1.2.2 Corporate Diversity and Inclusion Practices**

Finally, there is also a significant gap in the literature when it comes to linking diversity and inclusion (D&I) practices with acculturation outcomes. Empirical research on how specific D&I initiatives, driven by HR policies and top management leadership, influence the integration of migrant professionals remains limited. International evidence indicates that leadership commitment and diversity training led by HR departments can foster an organizational climate of belonging (Shore *et al.*, 2018). However, there are few qualitative studies specific to Ireland that analyze how these mechanisms are put into practice. This absence is especially relevant considering the increasing adoption of equality, diversity, and inclusion strategies by Irish employers.

### **1.3 Academic Justification**

The Irish labor market has significantly changed over the last few years, shifting from a historically homogeneous workforce to an increasingly multicultural one (O'Hagan & O'Toole, 2017). Census data and different studies show a notable increase in the number of foreign professionals. This change opens opportunities for innovation and organizational growth (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015; Raewf & Mahmood, 2021), but also raises challenges related to cultural integration, communication, and social cohesion in the workplace (Berry, 1997; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007).

The process of acculturation, the cultural and psychological change that occurs through continuous contact between groups, has been widely studied internationally, although the Irish professional context continues to receive little attention. Most existing studies focus on international students or low-skilled migration (Ma *et al.*, 2020) or students, leaving aside skilled professionals who perform jobs with high levels of demand, adaptability, and intercultural competence. This creates a gap in our understanding of how these professionals adapt to environments with sector-specific demands and expectations.

Furthermore, labor integration is often treated as an isolated process, without fully recognizing the importance of organizational culture, language proficiency, and external socioeconomic factors. As Niehoff and Maciocha (2008) point out, problems accessing housing can increase stress and limit social participation, but their link to adaptation in the Irish workplace has hardly been explored.

From an organizational perspective, diversity and inclusion practices have been identified as key factors in fostering employee engagement and retention (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015). However, in Ireland, there is little empirical evidence on how human resource policies and leadership commitment, particularly that of CEOs, influence the acculturation of foreign professionals. Although international studies suggest that inclusive leadership and specific HR interventions can improve intercultural relations and organizational cohesion (Hofstede, 2011; Raewf and Mahmood, 2021), these mechanisms have not been examined in depth in the Irish professional context.

This research seeks to address these gaps by qualitatively exploring the experiences of qualified foreign professionals in Ireland, using Berry's acculturation model (1997) as a conceptual framework. The study will analyze how integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization manifest themselves in the workplace, as well as how language, organizational inclusion practices, and socioeconomic conditions interact to shape adaptation outcomes. By situating the analysis at the intersection of acculturation theory, workforce diversity management, and the current reality of the Irish labor market, this research aims to contribute to both theoretical advancement and the development of practical strategies for promoting more inclusive professional environments.

#### **1.4 Research Aim(s)**

The present paper aims to explore and critically analyze the challenges faced by foreign professionals during their acculturation process in the Irish professional workplace. Following Berry's (1997) theoretical framework of acculturation, the research seeks to understand how these individuals manage the balance between maintaining their cultural identity and adapting to the norms and practices of the Irish workplace, and how this process is influenced by factors such as language proficiency, organizational inclusion policies, leadership support, and external socioeconomic conditions.

By focusing on skilled professionals from different sectors, the study aims to generate specific knowledge for the Irish context that will contribute both to academic literature and to the design of practical strategies aimed at promoting more inclusive and effective multicultural work environments.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

In response to achieving the purpose of this paper, as well as having a higher success rate in the results, this study is guided by the following questions

1. Integration: How do foreign professionals manage to maintain their cultural identity while actively participating in Irish work culture?
2. Assimilation: How do foreign professionals adapt to the norms and values of the Irish work environment, and how does this adaptation influence their personal and professional identity?



3. Separation: How does the decision to limit interaction with Irish work culture affect relationships, collaboration, and career progression?
4. Marginalization: What are the experiences and consequences for foreign professionals who feel disconnected from both their culture of origin and the Irish professional environment?

These research questions are framed within Berry's acculturation model (1997) and align directly with the study's objectives, ensuring theoretical coherence and a clear analytical approach throughout the research process.

## 1.6 Methods and Scope

### 1.6.1 Primary Research Sample

This study adopts a qualitative approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the acculturation experiences of foreign professionals in Ireland. The main method of data collection consists of semi-structured interviews, which allow participants to share their personal narratives while offering the researcher the opportunity to explore key themes within Berry's (1997) acculturation framework: Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization.

Six participants were selected through purposive sampling, drawing on the researcher's personal and extended networks. The diversity of participants ensures the inclusion of multiple perspectives and facilitates the comparison of adaptation experiences.

The chart below indicates an overview of participants:

*Table 1 Interviewees' Overview*

	NATIONALITY	COUNTRY	AGE	GENDER	YEARS IN IRELAND	COMPANY	LANGUAGE
<b>Participant one (LP)</b>	Italian	Italy	30	Male	7 years	Deutsche Bank	Italian
<b>Participant two (KS)</b>	Mexicana	Mexico	29	Female	3 years	Diageo	Spanish
<b>Participant three (NT)</b>	Brazilian/ Italian	Brazil	42	Female	2 years	Fleet tool and plant Buyer	Portuguese
<b>Participant four (MB)</b>	French	Guadeloupe	28	Male	4.5 years	Amundi	French
<b>Participant five (CB)</b>	French	Guadeloupe	28	Female	2.5 years	FKM	French
<b>Participant six (NB)</b>	French	France	29	Male	5 years	Amundi	French

### **1.6.2 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this research is limited to skilled migrants or professionals who are currently employed in Ireland. Unskilled migrant workers, asylum seekers, and international students are not included, as the adaptation challenges and work contexts of these groups may differ significantly.

The main focus is on acculturation in the workplace, analyzing how cultural identity, professional adaptation, and organizational factors intersect with external socioeconomic conditions, such as the availability and cost of housing.

While the findings are not statistically generalizable, they are analytically generalizable in relation to acculturation theory. Furthermore, they can serve as a basis for guiding good practices in human resource management, diversity and inclusion strategies, and leadership approaches in multicultural professional settings.

## **1.7 Dissertation Structure**

### **Chapter 1: Background to the Research Topic**

This research project begins by introducing the research topic, placing it in the context of growing cultural diversity in the Irish professional sector. It outlines the main gaps identified in the literature and presents the academic rationale for the study, formulates the research objective and questions, and describes the methodological scope, concluding with an overview of the dissertation structure.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter provides a critical review of the relevant literature. It examines the concepts of integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, along with related topics such as cultural identity, linguistic competence, leadership support, and diversity and inclusion practices. The chapter establishes connections between international studies and the Irish context, reinforcing the justification for the research.

### **Chapter 3 Methodology**

The methodology chapter describes the methodology adopted for the study, justifying the use of a qualitative approach. It explains the participant selection process and the use of semi-structured interviews. It also addresses ethical considerations, scope, and methodological limitations.

### **Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion**

This chapter discusses and critically analyses the findings of the primary research, organized around Berry's four acculturation strategies. It integrates these results with the literature review to highlight how language, organizational practices, leadership commitment, and external constraints influence the acculturation process of foreign professionals in Ireland.

### **Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Finally, this chapter concludes the study by summarizing the key findings concerning the research objective and questions. It outlines the theoretical and practical contributions of

the study and identifies possible avenues for future research to further deepen the understanding of acculturation in the Irish workplace.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter addresses the relevant academic literature related to globalization, cultural diversity in the workplace, and acculturation strategies, with a particular focus on the contemporary Irish context. In an increasingly interconnected world, globalization has generated profound transformations in the economic, social, political, and technological spheres (Gonzalez, 2016), fostering increasingly diverse and multicultural work environments. This review examines how these changes affect organizational dynamics as well as the integration of foreigners and the strategic role of human resource management in international contexts (Boddy, 2019).

Another matter of interest in the article written by Berry (1997) is to study what happens with the individuals who have grown up in a specific cultural context, and they seek to live and develop in a new cultural context. It also examines theories of acculturation, especially Berry's (1997) model, which provides insight into how migrants adapt to new cultural environments. Finally, key factors that influence these processes-such as language, intercultural awareness, and discrimination explored, as well as the role of organizational policies in promoting inclusion.

This review provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that will allow us to interpret the empirical findings in the following chapters and to establish connections between theory and practice in multicultural work contexts.

### **2.2 GLOBALIZATION**

Globalization is studied as an international phenomenon that has provoked significant changes in economic, political, technological, and social fields (Gonzalez, 2016). It is known that globalization is also a process of integration and collaboration; however, it could be a practice that tends to generate inequality, cultural homogenization, and loss of diversity.

In *The World is Flat*, Friedman (2006) identifies three stages of globalization, each marked by different protagonists and technological advances that transformed the way societies interconnect. The first stage, termed Globalization 1.0, extends from 1492 to

about 1800. During this period, globalization was driven primarily by imperial powers through exploration and conquest, resulting in a perceived reduction in the size of the world from large to medium.

The second stage, known as Globalization 2.0, spans from 1800 to 2000. In this phase, the central role was assumed by multinational corporations. Technological advances such as the railroad, telegraph, telephone and, later, the computer, facilitated more efficient connectivity on a global scale. As a result, the world went from medium to small in terms of interaction and scope.

The third stage, Globalization 3.0, began around the year 2000 and is distinguished by the empowerment of individuals and small organizations. Thanks to the development of digital tools, access to the Internet, the use of collaborative software and the emergence of technology platforms, people from different parts of the world can now compete and collaborate globally. In this context, Friedman (2006) argues that “the world has become flat,” referring to greater equity in access to opportunities and resources on an international scale.

Globalization has led to greater labor mobility and international integration, which has generated more culturally diverse workplaces. However, the author criticizes how globalization, while appearing to promote inclusion and equitable exchange, actually tends to standardize processes and cultures (Gonzalez, 2016).

### **2.1.1 Irish Context**

Today's globalization is no longer just a matter of big players (nations or corporations), but of ordinary people participating directly in the global economy thanks to technology (Friedman, 2006).

In workplace diversity contexts, this standardization can lead to real cultural differences not being valued and integrated, but rather neutralized or ignored (Gonzalez, 2016).

Therefore, since Ireland has experienced an immigration wave, the authors Niehoff and Maciocha (2008), in the *Irish Journal of Management*, have explored cultural adaptation and the motivations for immigrants in the labor Irish environment, this

study has found out that most of the foreign people have joined mainly for low salary jobs in sectors such as hospitality. As labor migration has increased, human resources managers are on the front line of this phenomenon, facing challenges in areas such as recruitment, training, and performance evaluation in a multicultural context (Niehoff and Maciocha, 2008).

### **2.1.2 Economy**

The book “The Economy of Ireland” by O’Hagan, J.W. and O’Toole, F. (2017) analyzes Ireland's economy, with a historical and current review, highlighting the country's economic growth since the 1960s, driven by foreign investment, education and European Union aid, after overcoming decades of ineffective protectionist policies.

However, unemployment remains the main problem, especially long-term unemployment, linked to job destruction in labor-intensive sectors and the growth of more capital-intensive multinational sectors (O’Hagan and O’Toole, 2017). Therefore, this study has an impact on the current global environment and the challenge that business diversity could face in the country.

### **2.1.3 Labor Market**

O’Hagan and O’Toole (2017) describe an extraordinary evolution of the Irish labor market in recent decades, highlighting a remarkable increase in employment between 1995 and 2008, with the creation of approximately 865,000 new jobs. However, this growth was drastically interrupted during the global financial crisis, when between 2008 and 2012 more than 310,000 jobs were lost and the unemployment rate soared from 5.7% to 15%.

### **2.1.4 Migration**

The analysis by O’Hagan and O’Toole (2017) highlights the determinant role of migration as a component of labor supply in Ireland, a feature that distinguishes it from other OECD countries, as well as the importance of the adaptability and skills of the labor force in the face of globalization, international competition and technological change.

These factors are highly relevant when studying the challenges faced by foreign professionals in the acculturation process within the Irish work environment, as exposure to structural transformations, employment fluctuations and high international mobility can condition their integration and adaptation to local norms, values and professional practices.

### **2.3 CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

According to the author, diversity implies accepting, understanding, and valuing differences among people, whether in terms of age, social class, race, culture, gender, or disability (Raewf and Mahmood, 2021).

Hofstede (2011) points out that, despite the fact that human beings share common ancestors, there is great cultural diversity among different societies. People from different regions of the world show notable differences in aspects such as communication, the way they react to authority, their work schedules, and many other areas of social life (Boddy, D., 2019).

It is also important to mention that a person's perception of themselves and others influences how they relate to others, which can impact teamwork and communication; therefore, human resources professionals must be prepared to handle these issues effectively, promoting knowledge, consistency, and adaptability.

Organizations require keeping diversity, since it will continue to grow in the future, so companies that want to remain competitive must invest in diversity management, because this can increase productivity and give them competitive advantages (Raewf and Mahmood, 2021).

#### **2.2.1 Benefits of Cultural Diversity**

Today, characterized by intense multiculturalism, the global movement of people, products, and capital has promoted not only exchange but also the integration of different cultural expressions, driven largely by technological advances. In a study of Cultural diversity with a focus on Cultural dimensions by Hofstede (2011), the study demonstrates that relationships within work teams play a key role in shaping experiences with diverse cultures and social contexts. Contact with foreign cultures



within these teams not only enriched their professional development but also had a notable impact on their personal sphere (Khairi, 2024).

At the same time, the proposed model by Hofhuis *et al.* (2015) evaluates both benefits and perceived threats. Benefits include better understanding of different social groups, greater creativity, image of social responsibility, advantages in the labor market and a more enriching social environment. On the other hand, threats include loss of career opportunities, threat to cultural values, intergroup anxiety and decreased productivity (Orsini and Magnier-Watanabe, 2023).

This is consistent with the findings of Raewf and Mahmood (2021), who highlight that any institution's effectiveness and profitability rely on its capability to maintain diversity and recognize its advantages.

### **2.2.2 Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Differences**

In increasingly diverse work environments, perceptions and attitudes towards cultural differences play a central role in team cohesion and performance. How employees interpret and react to cultural differences not only influences their interpersonal behavior but also their job satisfaction and overall well-being (Khairi, 2024).

Recent studies reaffirm the usefulness of Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2011), to analyze how these differences affect attitudes at work. Such a model allows understanding how certain cultures promote individualism or collectivism, aversion to uncertainty, or long-term orientation, which directly impact how employees perceive and value those who are different.

Overall, the study of perceptions and attitudes towards cultural diversity makes it possible to identify factors that facilitate or hinder integration, teamwork and professional satisfaction, especially in contexts marked by an aging workforce and the globalization of work environments.

### **2.2.3 Workplace Adaptation and Cultural Learning**

The term “adaptation” refers to actions that individuals or groups have because of the environment's demands, which can occur in the short term or even extend over longer term (Berry, 1997).

## **2.4 ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES – BERRY'S MODEL**

The acculturation has become a key topic in different multicultural studies, mainly on the way how immigrants adapt to the new country and start adopting social and cultural norms from the host country (Jaffe *et al.*, 2018)

According to Redfield *et al.* (cited in Jaffe *et al.*, 2018), acculturation refers to changes that occur when individuals from different backgrounds come into continuous and direct contact, leading to modifications in the cultural patterns of one or both groups.

Essentially, acculturation is a social learning process, where immigrants adopt the behaviors, beliefs, and values of a culture that differs from their own (Lee, 1981).

Berry (2005) developed a conceptual model of acculturation. According to him, this process does not simply consist of the non-dominant group adapting to the dominant one but is a mutual interaction that affects all the groups involved. To study this phenomenon, Berry proposed a two-dimensional scale, based on two main criteria that can have positive or negative values: orientation towards the culture of origin and orientation towards the culture of the receiving country (Jaffe *et al.*, 2018).

From the point of view of the non-dominant group (immigrants), Berry (1997) identified four acculturation strategies (Figure 1):

### **2.3.1 Integration**

The integration strategy is when elements of the original culture are maintained but aspects of the new culture are also adopted (Kosic, 2002), often considered the most beneficial approach to acculturation. Various studies have shown that this cultural balance is associated with higher levels of psychological well-being, smoother social adaptation, and greater life satisfaction. These results tend to be more favorable than those observed in the other three strategies described in

Berry's model: assimilation, separation, and marginalization, which, to a greater or lesser extent, may involve losses, tensions, or barriers in the adaptation process (Zhu, 2022).

According to the author, this strategy can only be reached in societies explicitly multicultural, where specific conditions are found, such as the acceptance of cultural diversity in the society, low levels of ethnocentrism, racism, and discrimination (Berry, 1997).

The strategy is known as collective, since can only be pursued when other members share the desire to maintain, that is to say, positive mutual attitudes.

### **2.3.2 Assimilation**

Assimilation is characterized by a low level of nostalgia or attachment to the culture of origin, along with a high degree of interaction and establishment of ties with the host group, that is to say, when a person abandons their culture of origin and fully adopts that of the host country (Kosic, 2002).

Assimilation involves the almost total dissolution of ethnic or cultural identity and occurs when a person completely adopts the culture of the host country, leaving behind their cultural heritage. There is a study called “Who Do I Want to Be Now That I'm Here?” which analyzes the acculturation process of different groups. And, in the case of refugees, for example, this process can be observed when there is a clear preference to disassociate oneself from one's cultural identity of origin and, at the same time, an active interest in integrating into the host community. This combination of factors increases the likelihood of choosing an assimilationist strategy, as the link with the new culture becomes a priority over the preservation of one's own cultural roots (Jones and Newman, 2024).

### **2.3.3 Separation**

In contrast to assimilation, the separation strategy is when individuals prioritize maintaining the culture of origin, and at the same time, the interaction with the new culture is avoided (Kosic, 2002).

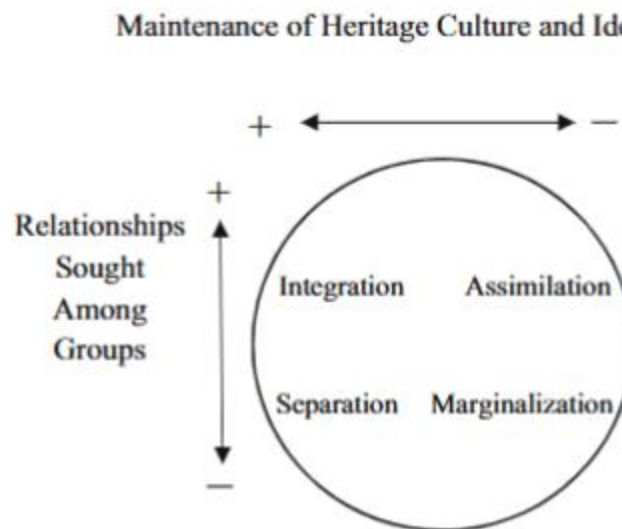
This approach implies greater identification with the community of origin than with the host community, as well as the absence of actively seeking ties with members of the receiving society (Jones and Newman, 2024).

#### **2.3.4 Marginalization**

Finally, this strategy comes over when there is no interest or possibility to maintain the original culture, nor interest in the culture of the host country is adopted as well as nor interest in creating or maintaining relationships with others, sometimes for reasons of exclusion or discrimination (Kosic, 2002).

Empirical studies have identified two levels of factors that influence psychological acculturation, at the group level, factors such as the migrant group's context of origin, the receiving country's migration policies, social attitudes and available social support are influential. Although these factors seem universal, their impact varies according to the specific cultural context (Berry, 1997). And at the individual level, the strategy of bicultural integration, maintaining elements of the original culture while adopting aspects of the new one, tends to be associated with better psychological outcomes than other strategies such as assimilation, separation or marginalization (Berry, 1997).

However, as observed by Berry (1997), its success depends on both the social environment and the individual's desire to integrate.



*Figure 1 Berry's strategies of acculturation*

## 2.5 FACTORS THAT AFFECT ACCULTURATION

Several studies highlight the fact that some immigrants adapt better than others, and it is because of specific demographic factors that affect this process. For example, it has been observed that women tend to experience higher levels of stress during the adaptation process compared to men (Berry 1997). Age is another relevant factor to consider, as younger immigrants generally adapt more easily the older. Additional demographic aspects such as educational background, socioeconomic status, and the availability of social support are also considered influential. Moreover, highlighted that the extent of cultural distance between the immigrant's country of origin and the host country, reflected in differences in language, values, and belief systems, can further complicate the adaptation process (Niehoff and Maciocha, 2008).

During cultural adaptation, many people face internal and external conflicts, which can lead to acculturation stress-a negative response to adaptive challenges when personal resources are not sufficient (Berry, 1997). Without adequate social support, this stress can impact mental health (Zhang and Goodson, 2011).

### 2.4.1 Language Barriers

As mentioned by Martin and Chaney (2012), Jeanette's reasoning relies too heavily on the importance of practicing and adopting the host language to improve the ability to communicate and reduce cultural shock.

Building relationships (*rapport*<sup>1</sup>) depends on the effective use of language, and in many parts of the world, establishing rapport with colleagues is essential for conducting business (Martin and Chaney, 2012). *Rapport* includes five aspects: the act of speaking, the content of speech, the inclusion or exclusion of people, stylistic aspects, and nonverbal language. Understanding how members of the host culture communicate, what topics are appropriate, and what nonverbal actions to use is key to making a good impression (Martin and Chaney, 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> *Rapport: a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well.*

Knowing the local language improves opportunities for social and professional interaction, allowing for deeper conversations and greater integration into society (Martin and Chaney, 2012).

However, similar studies have shown that when analyzing linguistic differences, two types of comparisons are identified: (a) within a single language and (b) between different languages (Casillas and Robbins, 2005).

#### **2.4.2 Cross-culture**

With increased globalization, cross-cultural encounters have become more common; therefore, it is essential to understand cultural attitudes such as family, religion, education, and work to build intercultural relationships (Martin and Chaney, 2012). Also, cross-cultural assessment has become a key area of interest for researchers to evaluate and study multicultural and multinational populations (Casillas and Robbins, 2005).

The importance of developing cross-cultural awareness (“mindfulness”) as an essential skill for managing effectively in diverse environments has been emphasized (Boddy, 2019).

#### **2.4.3 Discrimination**

In a study of international students, Ma *et al.* (2020) found that financial constraints are also significant, as international students often have restricted access to employment and do not qualify for federal loans in the host country, this can lead them to accelerate their studies to reduce expenses, which increases stress and the risk of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Lee et al. 2004). In addition, because they are considered a minority, these students sometimes face unfair treatment or discrimination, which negatively affects their emotional well-being.

Also, numerous studies in migration contexts have documented that foreign professionals face racial and ethnic discrimination in their host countries, a phenomenon that negatively affects their integration and psychological well-being. And like what was observed in international students, the perception of discrimination can come from both members of the majority group and other

minority groups, generating feelings of alienation, decreased self-esteem, and higher levels of stress and anxiety (Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007).

However, identification with like-minded migrant communities' functions as a coping mechanism that can mitigate the negative effects of discrimination, fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening individual resilience.

## **2.6 HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

At the organizational level, human resources managers are on the front line of the migration phenomenon. Their roles, which include the selection, training and orientation of new employees, as well as the development of leaders and the implementation of effective performance appraisal systems, have become more complex due to the increasing multiculturalism in Irish work environments (Niehoff and Maciocha, 2008).

Although an increase in immigration was already anticipated in developed countries (see Burke and Ng, 2006), the current magnitude of this phenomenon has presented a considerable challenge to human resource managers throughout Ireland (Niehoff and Maciocha, 2008).

What is known about international management from a professional and strategic perspective is that it is the administration of business operations in more than one country (Boddy, 2019)

Boddy (2019) highlights three main scenarios in which a professional can be involved: working as an expatriate manager, integrating or leading multicultural teams, and managing in global organizations whose structures and systems transcend their national origin.

International management requires not only technical and strategic knowledge, but also cultural and adaptive skills that enable the professional to successfully manage in globalized and dynamic contexts (Boddy, 2019).

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction to Research Methodology**

Research methodology refers to the overarching strategy and rationale of the research process, guiding the selection of methods, techniques, and procedures used to collect and analyze data (Creswell, 2014). It ensures alignment between research aims, questions, and outcomes, helping researchers make informed decisions about the most suitable approach. This chapter outlines the research philosophy, approach, strategy, and data collection methods that underpin this qualitative study, using the research onion framework (Saunders et al., 2019) to structure the methodology. This section is designed to align with the study's aim of exploring the lived experiences of foreign professionals integrating into the Irish workplace environment.

### **3.2 Research Aims and Objectives**

The primary aim of this study is to explore the challenges experienced by foreign professionals when acculturating within the Irish professional workplace, using Berry's Acculturation Model as a conceptual lens. This research aims to understand the interplay between cultural identity and workplace integration in a multicultural professional context, and the following research objectives have been set:

**Integration:** To understand how foreign professionals maintain aspects of their own cultural identity while actively participating in Irish workplace culture, and how this dual engagement shapes their sense of belonging and professional development.

**Assimilation:** To explore the experiences of foreign professionals who prioritize adapting to Irish professional norms and values, and how this influences their personal identity and workplace integration.

**Separation:** To examine why some foreign professionals choose to retain their original cultural practices while limiting interaction with Irish workplace culture, and how this decision impacts their workplace relationships and career progression.

**Marginalization:** To investigate the experiences of foreign professionals who feel disconnected from both their home culture and the Irish professional environment, and the psychological or social consequences of this lack of belonging.



### 3.3 Proposed Research Methodology

This study employs Saunders' (2019) research onion as a guiding framework. This represents the research as an onion composed of external, intermediate, and central layers, which define the different research methods. According to Saunders *et al.* (2019), this model involves uncovering each layer progressively, starting with the outermost layer before moving on to the next layers. The “Research Onion” illustrates different methodological approaches, structured in a sequence of decisions that must be made before defining the final methodological approach for the study and the data collection process.

While widely accepted, the model has been critiqued for its linear presentation, which may not fully capture the iterative nature of qualitative research, where reflection and adjustment often occur throughout the research process (Bryman, 2016).

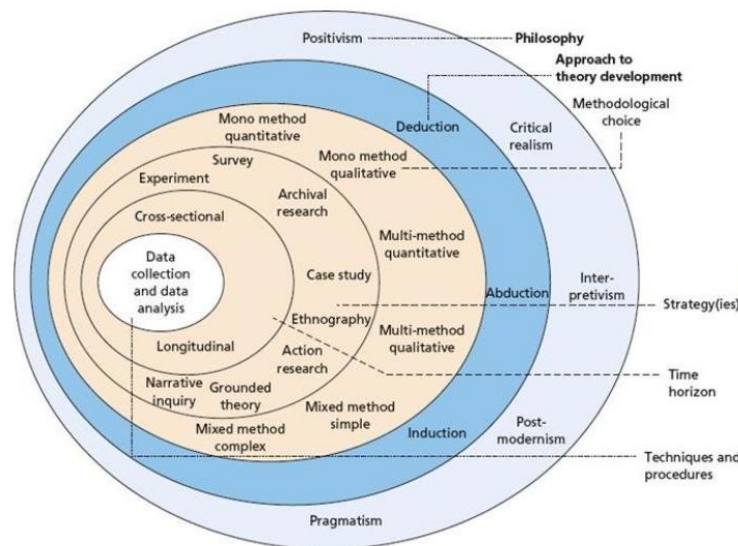


Figure 2 Saunders Research Onion: (Saunders, et al. 2009)

### **3.4 Research Philosophy**

Understanding the philosophical foundation of a research study is essential, as it shapes all aspects of the research design, from the formulation of research questions to data collection and interpretation (Creswell, 2017; Saunders *et al.*, 2019). According to Saunders *et al.* (2019), research philosophies are often grounded in personal beliefs, values, and assumptions about knowledge development.

In qualitative research, choosing the appropriate philosophy is essential to maintain coherence with the exploration and interpretive nature of the study. This section presents the philosophical bases that support this research, justify the selected approaches, and briefly mentions those philosophies that were considered but ultimately discarded. In this study, the main objective of the researcher was to reduce as much as possible any possible bias or prejudice; therefore, the choice of the correct philosophy became a fundamental aspect.

#### **3.4.1 Interpretivism and Constructivism**

The chosen philosophy is Interpretivism, which Bell *et al.* (2018) align with qualitative research, prioritizing lived experiences, cultural context, and subjective meanings. Also, it is acknowledged that social realities are constructed through human experience and interaction.

According to Sanders *et al.* (2019, pp.145) Interpretivism is a philosophical approach to qualitative research that understands reality as complex, rich and socially constructed through language, culture and experience. It focuses on interpreting meanings, perceptions, stories and processes from the perspective of the participants. It considers that the researcher is part of the phenomenon studied, so that his or her interpretation and reflexivity are key. This approach is usually inductive, works with small samples and uses qualitative methods to generate new understandings and visions of the world. This is appropriate as the research explores individual experiences of acculturation, which are inherently subjective and context dependent.

Also in this study, a constructivist view is adopted, which means that reality is not something objective or fixed. Instead, each person builds their own version of reality based on their experiences, culture, and social context. This means that there is not just one truth, but many different realities depending on who is experiencing them. This approach refers to understanding what reality is and what can be known about it.

For that reason, the purpose of this study is not to find an absolute or general truth, but to understand how participants make sense of their own experiences. The goal is to interpret these experiences, and the meanings people give to them, especially about their process of acculturation and integration in the Irish workplace (Creswell, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019).

It is also important to mention that there are different types of constructivism. Some researchers agree that reality is constructed, but they disagree about whether there is an external reality that exists independently of what we think or perceive. For instance, Lincoln and Guba had different views on this topic in their earlier and later works, showing that constructivism is not a fixed idea but can be interpreted in different ways.

### **3.4.2 Positivism and pragmatism as rejected**

One of the approaches that was not selected for this study was positivism. According to Wilson (2016), positivism is based on the belief that knowledge must come from observable and measurable facts, and that only data that can be verified through empirical evidence is considered valid. This perspective contrasts with the interpretivist approach adopted before in this research. While interpretivism seeks to understand the subjective experiences of participants, positivism focuses on objectivity and distance from the research subjects, following a more scientific and detached process. Additionally, positivism is typically linked to quantitative methods, which aim to produce results free from researcher values. In contrast, interpretivism is aligned with qualitative research, where the role of the researcher and the context of the study are seen as influential and meaningful.

The alternative approach rejected is pragmatism, for this one, the truth of a statement is based on its practical consequences: if what is stated produces good results and is confirmed by experience, then it is “true” (Hampson and McKinley, 2023).

Not adopted due to the study's strictly qualitative design, making the flexible, mixed-method approach unnecessary and potentially inconsistent with the study's epistemological stance.

### **3.5 Research Approach**

For this research, the adopted approach is inductive, as it allowed to let themes and patterns to emerge naturally from the participants' testimonies, without imposing rigid categories from the outset (Thomas, 2006). This approach was considered to be the most consistent with the exploratory nature of the study, in which it was essential to understand how acculturation experiences are developed in the workplace from the direct voices of those who live them. By not starting from closed hypotheses, this study has the flexibility to follow lines of analysis that I had not anticipated but that emerged strongly during the data collection process.

The objective of this study is to understand experiences that are, by nature, diverse and complex. Following the logic of the inductive approach, first, it was observed and recorded the specific experiences of foreign professionals and then identified patterns and constructed solid interpretations based on that evidence (Bryman, 2016). This process proved particularly useful for capturing nuances that a more rigid framework might have overlooked, such as small gestures of inclusion or subtleties in intercultural communication that emerged in the interviews.

Table 2 The Coding Process in Inductive Analysis. (Thomas, 2006)

The Coding Process in Inductive Analysis				
Initial reading of text data	Identify specific text segments related to objectives	Label the segments of text to create categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Create a model incorporating most important categories
Many pages of text	Many segments of text	30 to 40 categories	15 to 20 categories	3 to 8 categories

## Approach rejected

The deductive method, which is more characteristic of quantitative studies aimed at testing hypotheses, did not fit the needs of this research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This approach would have limited the scope for discovering new understandings and emerging explanations, reducing the interpretive richness that we sought to obtain. As mentioned before, in the context of this study, it was a priority to preserve openness to explore experiences in all their complexity, without the prior filter of a closed theoretical framework.

## 3.6 Research Strategy

### Qualitative / Semi-structured interviews

The study adopted a qualitative strategy, considered the most appropriate for exploring human experiences and perceptions in depth, allowing nuances to be captured that other approaches might overlook (Flick, 2018). Semi-structured interviews offered the necessary balance between consistency and flexibility: on the one hand, they ensured that all participants addressed the key issues linked to Berry's acculturation model; on the other, they provided space for stories and reflections specific to each professional career to emerge.

This interview format proved particularly valuable for several reasons. First, it facilitated the exploration of complex personal experiences, in which cultural, linguistic, and organizational factors interact constantly. Second, it allowed questions to be adapted according to the flow of the conversation, encouraging further exploration of unexpected but relevant aspects. Finally, it made it possible to record emotions, interpretations, and cultural nuances that provided a richer understanding of the acculturation process.

### **Limitations of quantitative methods**

While quantitative methods are useful for generalizing results, they have limitations when it comes to capturing the complexity and personal meaning of individual experiences. In the context of this research, which focused on understanding how foreign professionals experience and make sense of their adaptation to the work environment, an exclusively quantitative approach could have overlooked essential details, such as the subtleties of intercultural interaction or subjective perceptions of inclusion (Creswell, 1017).

### **3.7 Qualitative Data Primary Collection**

The process applied was semi-structured interviews, conducted remotely, and audio recorded, facilitating participants to part with their views on the research topic. The interviews were designed using open-ended questions linked to Berry's categories of acculturation. This format allowed the conversation to be steered toward key topics cultural identity, integration in the workplace, and challenges faced, and at the same time leaving room for participants to delve deeper into their own experiences and reflections.

Overall process outlined below:

1. The data collection involved six interviews
2. Each participant took part in a 20-40-minute interview session
3. Participants were selected using purposive sampling due to their direct relevance to the research objectives and lived experience with cultural transition in Irish workplaces.
4. The aim is to gain participants' perspectives through thirteen questions related to the research objectives

Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between clear thematic guidance and the flexibility of open dialogue. This approach is particularly valuable for understanding personal interpretations of complex social processes, such as acculturation, as it allows for comparable data to be obtained between participants while capturing the unique nuances of each narrative (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Types of Questions:

Q.1 Are there any aspects of Irish workplace culture that you intentionally choose not to engage with? Why?

Q.2 Have there been moments when you felt disconnected from both your culture and the Irish culture? Can you describe those experiences?

### **3.8 Population/Sample**

The target population for this study consists of foreign professionals currently working in Ireland. The research adopted purposive sampling, a non-probabilistic technique that allows participants to be selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the study. As Bryman (2016) states, this type of sampling is particularly suitable for qualitative research, where the aim is to achieve a deep understanding rather than to generalize results statistically.

The selected participants came from personal networks, and they are from different nationalities, including French, Brazilian, Mexican, and Italian, which allowed for the incorporation of a diversity of cultural perspectives on the acculturation process. This variety enriched the analysis by offering nuances in individual experiences without compromising the feasibility of fieldwork. The sample size, between six and eight people, reflects the qualitative logic of prioritizing depth over breadth (Creswell, 2017). Working with a small group favors the collection of detailed and nuanced accounts, which translates into richer and more contextual interpretations (Kvale, 2009). In addition, Saunders et al. (2019) note that when the research objectives are specific and the sample is carefully selected, a limited number of interviews may be sufficient to achieve data saturation. The cultural diversity of the sample also contributes to the credibility and transferability of the results.

## **Data analysis**

The analysis began with the collection of audio recordings, made with the consent of the interviewees, which were then transcribed verbatim. In order to protect the identity of the participants, anonymization and pseudonymization processes were applied. Based on the transcripts, a hybrid encoding was constructed that included, in the deductive dimension, the four acculturation strategies proposed by Berry, and, in the inductive dimension, the categories that emerged from the experiences recounted.

The analytical process involved initial familiarization with the data, the generation of preliminary codes, the identification of possible themes, their review and refinement, and, finally, the preparation of the report accompanied by representative quotes. This approach allowed us to capture both expected patterns and unexpected findings, while maintaining the methodological rigor of qualitative research.

Finally, the flexibility, thematic analysis offered the advantage of facilitating cross-cultural comparison, highlighting both similarities and differences in acculturation strategies among people from different backgrounds. This ability to contrast made it a particularly valuable tool for addressing the research objectives.

### **3.9 Analyzing Qualitative Data**

In this study, qualitative data analysis was carried out using a thematic analysis approach, widely used in interpretive and constructivist paradigms. This method, recognized for its flexibility, is particularly well-suited to identifying, analyzing, and describing patterns within data, especially when working with rich, narrative information, such as that found in semi-structured interviews (Thomas, 2006).

Thematic analysis allows us to go beyond superficial observations and get into the deeper meanings that participants attribute to their experiences (Ahmed *et al.*, 2025). This is particularly useful in research focused on acculturation, where context and personal interpretation play a fundamental role.

After the interviews were conducted, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in order to capture every detail as accurately as possible. Transcription is an essential stage in qualitative research, as it converts spoken language into text that can be systematically



analyzed. The transcripts were then anonymized to protect the confidentiality of the participants, replacing real names with pseudonyms. This practice, in addition to aligning with ethical research principles, helps to reinforce the reliability of the study, one of the central criteria for rigor in qualitative research.

The analytical procedure followed the six phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). First, the transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve a thorough familiarity with the content. Initial codes were then generated from fragments of data that were significant or relevant. These codes were grouped to form preliminary themes, which were then reviewed for consistency with the data set. Once the themes were defined and named, the report was prepared, integrating theoretical interpretations and quotes from participants. This process with an hybrid approach combined an inductive approach, which allowed categories to emerge directly from the data, with a deductive approach based on theoretical frameworks such as Berry's acculturation model, following the recommendations of Thomas (2006).

The use of thematic analysis is particularly appropriate for this research because, although it is not linked to a specific theoretical framework, it fits coherently with the interpretive and constructivist philosophy that guides the study. Its flexible structure allowed us to remain open to unexpected findings while maintaining alignment with the objectives set (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

*Table 3 Template Sample*

<b>Interview ID</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Direct quote</b>	<b>Deductive Quote</b>	<b>Inductive quote</b>	<b>Analytical Notes</b>	<b>General theme</b>	<b>Line reference</b>
<b>P1</b>							
<b>P1</b>							
<b>P1</b>							
<b>P1</b>							
<b>P1</b>							
<b>P1</b>							
<b>P1</b>							

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter compiles and analyzes the findings of interviews conducted with foreign professionals working in Ireland. The intention has been to combine the results obtained with an interpretation that takes into account the existing literature, so as not to lose sight of the academic context. The common thread is based on Berry's (1997) model of four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, although in practice, some topics emerged that did not entirely fit into this framework. Therefore, in addition to the deductive categories derived from the model, we also incorporated findings that emerged directly from the experiences reported by the participants.

According to previous studies that have highlighted the importance of external factors such as language proficiency, intercultural awareness, and the perception of discrimination in adaptation processes (Martin and Chaney, 2012; Niehoff and Maciocha, 2008; Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007), we explore here how these aspects are reflected in everyday working life. Some of these issues, although anticipated, manifested themselves in unexpected ways, adding interesting nuances to the analysis.

Finally, we decided to present the results and discussion in the same section. In this way, the voices of the interviewees can “dialogue” directly with the academic discourse, which we believe enriches the interpretation. This also allows us to situate professional trajectories.

### **4.2 Overview of Participants**

This section provides a brief introduction to the six participants whose experiences form the basis of the analysis developed in this chapter. All are foreign professionals currently working in Ireland, although they differ in nationality, sector of employment, and length of residence in the country. This diversity of backgrounds allows us to examine different paths of acculturation and forms of adaptation to the work environment, in line with the heterogeneity found in previous studies on migrant professionals (Haslberger, 2005b; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015).

The table below summarizes the main demographic and professional data for each participant, as well as the predominant acculturation strategy identified in the analysis. To protect their identity, pseudonyms have been assigned to all cases.

*Table 4 Acculturation strategy detected*

<b>Participant (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Sector / Role</b>	<b>Time in Ireland</b>	<b>Main Acculturation Strategy</b>
Participant one (LP)	Italian	IT – Software Engineer	3 years	Integration
Participant two (KS)	Mexican	Supply Chain – Export Specialist	< 1 year	Integration (early stage)
Participant three (NT)	Brazilian	Education – Catering Assistant	2 years	Integration + moments of Separation/Marginalization
Participant four (MB)	Guadeloupe (FR)	Finance – Manager in Multinational Firm	5 years	Integration
Participant five (CB)	Guadeloupe (FR)	Construction – Quantity Surveyor	2 years	Integration
Participant six (NB)	French	Finance	5 years	Integration + assimilation

This heterogeneity provides valuable insight into how factors such as length of residence in Ireland, the work cultures specific to each sector, and personal support networks influence the adoption of different acculturation strategies. Although integration seems to be the most common strategy, there are variations in both its form and degree of success, as well as isolated cases of separation and marginalization, generally associated with contextual circumstances or emotionally charged moments.

### **4.3 Qualitative Research Findings**

The qualitative results presented in this section come from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six foreign professionals currently working in Ireland. Their accounts offer a rich and contextualized view of how they live and cope with the Irish work environment, highlighting both common patterns and individual differences in their adaptation processes. Using a hybrid coding approach, combining deductive categories based on Berry's acculturation model (1997) with inductively emerging themes, the analysis goes beyond superficial description to reveal the complex interaction between

cultural identity, organizational dynamics, and personal matters. The findings are presented thematically, supported by direct quotes from participants and interpreted considering the relevant literature.

#### **4.3.1 Objective 1: Integration, cultural identity, and integration explores how participants balance their heritage with Irish norms.**

The experience of Participant one, an Italian professional with more than six years in Ireland, fits quite well with what Berry (1997) describes as an integration strategy. According to this author, integration occurs when a person retains important features of their culture of origin but also adopts key aspects of the host culture. In his case, his professional career from postgraduate studies in finance to a customer service position within a multinational company was marked by early contact with a very diverse work environment. He describes it as “a mix of nationalities, although mostly Irish” and, above all, “inclusive” (Interview, Participant one). That sense of inclusion seems to have reinforced his sense of belonging, which is consistent with Berry's idea that integration occurs more easily in environments that openly value cultural diversity.

In terms of cultural practices, he actively maintains Italian customs, especially those related to food and socializing. For example, he often brings traditional dishes to the office or occasionally organizes aperitifs with Italian colleagues. These gestures serve as cultural markers, helping him to maintain ties to his roots while also sharing his culture with others. At the same time, he has adopted some customs typical of working in Ireland, such as the culture of going out for a drink after work, which he found strange at first. This combination reflects integration as a two-way process: it is not about abandoning one's own culture or closing oneself off, but rather about exchange.

When giving advice to newcomers, he emphasizes cultural openness and reciprocity: “Be open to change... understand how they behave, how you can bring your culture, and how both sides can influence each other.” (Interview, Participant one) This vision reflects the potential for mutual enrichment found in integration,

something that the literature on diversity in organizations also emphasizes (Raewf & Mahmood, 2021; Hofhuis et al., 2015).

Significantly, his case shows a positive path to integration, in which he has maintained his cultural identity, adopted the norms of the host country, and took advantage of multicultural networks to overcome initial challenges. Although he has not experienced significant marginalization or separation, he has detected nuances, such as the complexity of socializing in certain Irish circles that encourage companies not to limit themselves to formal inclusive policies, but also to promote deeper intercultural connections in everyday work.

It was also found that Participant four, originally from Guadeloupe, that is to say, with a different background from participant one, but very similar results, and with five years of professional experience in Ireland, describes a smooth and rapid process of labor integration, clearly aligned with Berry's integration strategy (1997). His career path from analyst to management positions within a French multinational with operations in Ireland illustrates how organizational culture and individual adaptability can facilitate acculturation. In his case, his previous experience in international environments, both through training and working in other countries, acted as a buffer against the difficulties that foreign professionals often face upon arrival (Haslberger, 2005b).

Later, the scenario of participant five, originally from Guadeloupe and currently working in Ireland as a quantity surveyor, describes a rapid and positive integration process, very similar to the integration strategy proposed by Berry (1997). His adaptation was marked by two key factors: the inherently collaborative and non-hierarchical work culture of his construction company, and the personal support of his partner upon arrival. This combination reduced the stress of acculturation often mentioned in the literature on migration (Zhang & Goodson, 2011) and allowed the adjustment period to pass without major friction.

Later, with the participant six, a French professional with a master's degree in finance and training in computer science and mathematics, who has been working in Ireland for five years as a reporting analyst. His integration trajectory fits mainly

into the model, although with one nuance: selective participation in certain aspects, especially when cultural references are very different from his own.

#### **4.3.1.1 Language as a Key Factor**

When the subjects were asked about the main challenge they have had, the majority commented that it is the language barrier, since the participants are not native English speakers. They all agree that they had to learn and perfect their English, gradually adapting to the Irish accent.

Participant two understands language not only as a technical skill, but also as a social key that facilitates adaptation. Although she acknowledges that she sometimes prefers to interact with Mexican colleagues, despite this factor can limit interaction with others, she values that relationship as a source of support and a space for learning. This aligns with what Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) observe: ethnic support networks can cushion the stress of adaptation while allowing integration to progress gradually.

The most obvious challenge she mentions is understanding certain Irish accents in professional contexts, especially in meetings. It does not prevent her from doing his daily work, but she finds it uncomfortable to have to ask people to repeat themselves, and she describes this situation as socially awkward. This is a nuance that, although small, can influence participation and confidence, as Zhang and Goodson (2011) point out. This is an example of how, even in linguistically inclusive environments, communication challenges can persist and slow down the integration process.

In contrast to, in the case of participant three, for instance, the patience of her Irish colleagues, who repeated and clarified information, when necessary, was essential in reducing her stress levels during the adaptation process, in line with what Zhang and Goodson (2011) point out about the role of support from the host community.

For participant five, the language, like the rest of the participants, was the main initial challenge, particularly adapting to Irish accents. However, he reached a functional level of comfort within three or four months, demonstrating the potential for accelerated learning in environments where peers practice patient and adaptive communication (Martin & Chaney, 2012). This supportive dynamic reinforces previous findings in the literature that the attitude of the host team is crucial to speeding up integration, something that Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) also emphasize when discussing social inclusion.

#### **4.3.1.2 Social and Organizational Inclusion**

The structural support of a multicultural environment coexists with personal challenges related to language and socialization, offering a window into the initial phase of professional integration, as in the case of participant two. Her account supports the idea, widely reported in the literature (Niehoff & Maciocha, 2008; Martin & Chaney, 2012), that inclusive environments and language skills are key to successful integration, while showing how the support of compatriots can be both a bridge and a barrier to intercultural adaptation.

It was found that for participants one and three, food plays a central role in the integration process for most participants, who share and discuss culinary practices from their country of origin, thereby sharing an important part of their cultural heritage. These actions, in addition to strengthening diversity in the workplace, create informal spaces for intercultural learning, something that the literature recognizes as a path to mutual enrichment (Hofhuis et al., 2015; Raewf & Mahmood, 2021).

Participant four comments that the fusion between his cultural background and Irish work culture occurred “naturally,” without requiring major behavioral changes, beyond improving his English to communicate better. This type of adaptation fits with Berry's idea that integration thrives especially in environments open to diversity and cultural exchange. In his company, the international composition of the team and inclusive policies created a context similar to that of

the “explicitly multicultural societies” described by the author, characterized by low ethnocentricity and high acceptance of diversity.

A central element in their sense of belonging is the company's commitment to fostering a shared organizational culture through regular events and working groups. This coincides with what Hofhuis et al. (2015) point out about the relevance of structured opportunities for intercultural contact as a way to strengthen cohesion and mutual understanding. The participant tries to attend all these activities and is only absent due to scheduling conflicts, reflecting an active commitment that the literature also associates with stronger integration (Niehoff & Maciocha, 2008). Although his team includes colleagues from Brazil, Italy, China, and France, he acknowledges that outside of work he tends to interact more with French colleagues due to cultural affinity. However, in the workplace, the use of English as a common language to avoid exclusion is a deliberate strategy that fits with what Martin and Chaney (2012) propose regarding the importance of a shared language to ensure equitable participation in multicultural teams.

Socially, for participant four, integration within the company follows a particular pattern. Although there are few French colleagues, he connects with other foreign professionals, whom he perceives as more open to socializing outside of working hours. He describes his Irish colleagues as friendly but more focused on their family life. This type of interaction reflects a balance between integration and a certain affinity toward similar reference groups, which allows for the building of strong bonds without excluding contact with the local population.

Participant six, for example, works for a French company based in Dublin, which gives him a cultural anchor and, at the same time, a multinational environment. The presence of French colleagues provides him with comfort and shared values, but he also interacts daily with Irish colleagues and those of other nationalities, which opens up space for cultural exchange.

On a social level, participant six agrees with the practices of participant one, dividing his time between compatriots and colleagues from other backgrounds.



They both consider this mix to be positive because it allows them to learn from other cultures while maintaining emotional support networks.

This balance fits with what Berry (1997) describes as integration, but their case shows that it does not always involve participating equally in all cultural spheres; sometimes, adaptation is selective and depends on personal interest or relevance.

#### **4.3.2 Objective 2: Assimilation, adaptation to Irish norms, assess the extent to which participants adopt Irish norms.**

In the case of the participant one as for the adjustment period, he estimates that it took him “about a year, maybe a year and a half” to feel culturally fluent, especially in areas such as communication style and sense of humor, which Hofstede (2011) considers to be closely linked to each culture. He did not feel, he says, a long period of disconnection from either his Italian heritage or Irish culture, although he does acknowledge that it took him longer to form deep friendships with Irish colleagues. This coincides with the observations of Niehoff and Maciocha (2008), who point out that, despite inclusive policies, foreign professionals may encounter initial barriers to forming close ties with locals.

Participant six perceives few differences between Irish and French practices, which reduced the need to make major adjustments beyond language. This contrasts with the experience of other participants who come from more diverse cultures and must adapt to very different work norms. Even so, he mentions moments of disconnection, especially when conversations revolve around topics that are very specific to the local culture, and he cannot find a point of reference in either his culture of origin or his host culture.

#### **4.3.3 Objective 3: Separation, explore intentional cultural distance.**

The story of Participant two, a Mexican professional with less than a year of work experience in Ireland, also fits within the integration strategy described by Berry (1997), although still in its early stages. Her account reflects both an active willingness to adopt Irish work norms and a strong connection to her culture of

origin, something that seems to be facilitated by the multicultural context in which she finds herself. After moving from the hospitality sector to a position in exports within the supply chain, and after completing her postgraduate studies, she joined a company with a diverse team made up of people from Italy, Brazil, Mexico, Poland, and Ireland. This diversity, she says, reduced the “cultural distance” (Schmitz, 2001) and provided her with a welcoming environment in which to adapt.

Culturally, for participant two, there are marked differences between the way people work in Mexico and Ireland. According to her, in Mexico it is common to work longer hours and maintain a more intense pace, while in Ireland there is a greater balance between personal life and work, with fewer overtime hours. This change fits with Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2011), especially in terms of tolerance for uncertainty and time orientation at work.

She has been able to adapt to this dynamic without giving up the values of her culture of origin, which shows an adaptive flexibility that is very characteristic of the integration approach.

#### **4.3.4 Objective 4: Marginalization, challenges, and understanding feelings of isolation and cultural dislocation.**

The trajectory of Participant three, a Brazilian worker with two years of work experience in Ireland, shows a certain process of marginalization. On the one hand, there is a clear willingness to adopt aspects of Irish work culture; on the other hand, she maintains essential elements of her cultural identity and shows moments of marginalization, especially in emotionally difficult periods, such as the nostalgia she feels.

Despite having a generally positive environment and a supportive management team, participant three's sense of belonging is not always consistent. She comments that in the “good times” she feels part of the team, but in the more difficult stages, nostalgia and frustration arise, especially due to differences in conflict management: in Brazil, confrontation is more common; in Ireland, it tends to be avoided. This perception coincides with Hofstede's cultural dimensions

(2011), especially in relation to communication styles and power distance, and with the observations of Niehoff and Maciocha (2008) on the challenges that can arise even in inclusive environments.

#### **4.4 Cross-Cutting Factors Affecting Acculturation**

##### **4.4.1 Housing and Living Conditions**

In the scenario of participant four, the most notable challenges have not been cultural, but structural: the high cost and low quality of housing, as well as limited access to healthcare without corporate support. Although these factors fall outside Berry's direct framework, they relate to what the literature on migration says about how external living conditions influence the overall experience of adaptation (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). His case reminds us that, even with positive labor integration, external socioeconomic factors can be significant sources of stress.

Outside the workplace, for participant five, the biggest challenge mentioned is the difficulty in finding housing, a problem that coincides with what other participants have pointed out and is linked to broader socioeconomic limitations affecting migrant professionals in Ireland. This fits with what Zhang and Goodson (2011) point out about how adaptation depends as much on integration at work as on stability in living conditions.

##### **4.4.2 Personal and Pre-Migration Factors**

For two out of six participants from less developed countries, among the factors that have helped them adapt, they highlight the opportunities they see in Ireland compared to the structural limitations of their respective countries of origin, which reinforces their motivation to keep going despite the challenges. Their advice for newcomers: learn English, come with savings, and maintain the ability to adapt. These recommendations coincide with the key skills for intercultural competence identified in the literature (Boddy, 2019; Berry, 1997).

#### **4.4.3 Host culture**

Participants agree that, although they have established relationships with Irish colleagues, they perceive them as more reserved, which can limit deeper social integration. However, one of the most critical points mentioned by one of the participants is the tendency she perceives in some Irish work environments to avoid confrontation, which sometimes leads to passive-aggressive behavior, such as reducing working hours without explanation. This aspect coincides with what the literature describes as intercultural misunderstandings in feedback and conflict management (Boddy, 2019) and suggests the need for clearer communication norms in multicultural teams.

Even though the elements that most facilitated adaptation for participant four were the open and welcoming attitude of his Irish colleagues, which differs from the experiences of the previous participant, and supports the idea that interpersonal warmth and active inclusion accelerate acculturation (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

Participant six acknowledges that the fusion of his cultural background with Irish work culture has not been entirely smooth. Some references and inside jokes among Irish people are foreign to him, not because of deliberate exclusion, but because they are very local. In such cases, his social participation depends more on context than on constant involvement.

## **Study limitations**

Although the data collected show consistent similarities between the opinions of the interviewees and the existing literature, as well as the acculturation experiences of foreign professionals in Ireland, it is important to recognize that they cannot be considered conclusive due to the qualitative nature of the research approach and the existing limitations. First, the sample size was small ( $n = 6$ ) and participants were recruited through personal networks, which could introduce selection bias and limit the representativeness of the findings. In addition, most occupy professional positions in specific sectors and are similar in age range, thus excluding perspectives from other industries or non-professional occupations.

With a longer time frame, it would have been possible to perform a more comprehensive statistical analysis on a larger sample of individuals. However, the author considers that the sample size was adequate for the purposes of this study.

Secondly, although the qualitative approach used provides a wealth of detail, it does not allow for statistical generalization to the entire population of foreign professionals in Ireland. Rather, the findings seek analytical generalization, connecting participants' narratives with established theories and previous research.

Language proficiency may also have influenced the depth or nuance of the responses, especially in the case of those who expressed themselves in a language other than their mother tongue.

Finally, the research is set in a specific temporal and socioeconomic context, marked by housing challenges and certain labor market conditions in Ireland at the time of data collection. Factors such as changes in immigration policies, the economic situation, or workplace diversity initiatives could alter the validity of these results in the future.

Despite these limitations, the study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of cultural adaptation processes in the Irish workplace and highlights areas of interest for both future research and practical application.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by foreign professionals in their acculturation process within the Irish professional workplace, applying Berry's (1997) theoretical framework to analyze experiences of integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Through a qualitative and interpretive approach, based on semi-structured interviews with participants from diverse national backgrounds and professional backgrounds, the research has provided a rich and specific understanding of the context in which cultural adaptation takes place in Ireland's multicultural professional environment.

The findings show that integration was the most common acculturation strategy, with participants seeking to balance the preservation of their cultural identity with active participation in Irish work norms. Language proficiency, particularly the ability to understand different accents and sector-specific terminology, was consistently identified as a factor that both facilitated and hindered full inclusion. Assimilation was present in some cases, especially among those seeking to adapt quickly to organizational expectations; however, this process sometimes led to a weaker connection to the culture of origin.

Situations of separation, where interaction with Irish work culture was limited, were generally linked to the comfort of remaining in established ethnic networks or the perception that cultural adaptation was not necessary for job performance. Marginalization, although less frequent in the experiences analyzed, highlighted the emotional and social cost of feeling disconnected from both the host culture and the culture of origin. This feeling of disconnection became even more difficult to cope with when it coincided with external problems, such as a lack of available housing or the high cost of living, which added additional pressure to the daily lives of migrant professionals.

By bringing these findings into dialogue with existing literature, the study provides a more nuanced view of acculturation in professional contexts. It helps to bridge the gap between research focused on adaptation to the work environment and the socioeconomic realities that often act as a backdrop and condition the results. Furthermore, it highlights the value

of organizational practices, especially those driven by human resources departments and supported by management, in promoting more inclusive environments. It also underscores the need to create specific support that facilitates not only cultural adaptation but also professional integration.

In short, this work not only contributes to enriching the academic conversation on acculturation in the workplace in Ireland but also provides practical recommendations for employers and policymakers to attract, retain, and support international talent in an increasingly competitive labor market.

## **5.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study has provided valuable insights into the acculturation experiences of foreign professionals in Ireland, several aspects remain to be explored in order to strengthen both the theoretical understanding and practical application of this field.

First, it would be useful for future research to broaden the participant base to include a more diverse range of nationalities, sectors, and geographic locations within Ireland. This would allow for more enriched comparative analysis while addressing the limitations of the sample used in this study. As Niehoff and Maciocha (2008) point out, the motivations and adaptation patterns of immigrant workers can vary significantly depending on the sector and regional context.

Second, it is recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted to track the evolution of acculturation strategies over time. Acculturation is not a static process, but is influenced by changes in workplace demands, personal circumstances, and the sociopolitical context (Berry, 2005; Zhang and Goodson, 2011). Such studies could reveal how integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization strategies develop and transform over time.

Third, the adoption of quantitative or mixed approaches could help to more accurately measure the direct impact of specific organizational practices—such as diversity and inclusion training, mentoring programs, or language support—on acculturation outcomes. This would respond to calls by Hofhuis *et al.*, (2015) for rigorous evaluation of the benefits and potential challenges of workplace diversity.

Fourth, incorporating the perspectives of Irish colleagues and managers would provide a more comprehensive view of labor integration. Previous research has shown that host culture attitudes play a key role in the adaptation of migrants (Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007; Orsini and Magnier-Watanabe, 2023).

Finally, further exploration of the relationship between workplace acculturation and external socioeconomic factors, such as housing affordability, access to healthcare, or migration policy, would be equally valuable.

As O'Hagan and O'Toole (2017) emphasize, macroeconomic conditions can significantly influence labor market participation and, consequently, integration outcomes.

Addressing these lines of research would broaden the foundations laid by this thesis and contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of acculturation in the Irish professional workplace.



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## **Appendix 1: Interview Questions**

### **Part 1: Understand the participant's background, build rapport.**

Q.1 Can you tell me a bit about your background and how you came to work in Ireland?

Q.2 How long have you been working in a professional capacity in Ireland?

Q.3 What type of role do you currently hold, and what is the general culture like in your workplace?

### **Part 2: Cultural Identity and Integration, explore how participants balance their heritage with Irish norms.**

Q.1 Have you found ways to blend your cultural background with Irish workplace culture? Can you give an example?

Q.2 Do you feel a sense of belonging in your current workplace? Why or why not?

### **Part 3: Adaptation to Irish Norms, assess the extent to which participants adopt Irish norms.**

Q.1 Have you made any changes in the way you behave or communicate at work to fit in with Irish professional norms?

Q.2 How comfortable are you with Irish work practices, and how long did it take to adapt?

### **Part 4: Cultural Separation, explore intentional cultural distance.**

Q.1 Are there any aspects of Irish workplace culture that you intentionally choose not to engage with? Why?

Q.2 Do you mainly socialize or interact with people from your own cultural background at work? How does this affect your experience?

### **Part 5: Marginalization & Challenges, understanding feelings of isolation and cultural dislocation.**

Q.1 Have there been moments when you felt disconnected from both your culture and the Irish culture? Can you describe those experiences?

Q.2 What have been the most significant challenges you've faced as a foreign professional in Ireland?

**Part 6: REFLECTION & *SUGGESTIONS***

Q.1 Looking back, what helped you most in adjusting to the Irish workplace?

Q.2 What advice would you give to other foreign professionals starting out in Ireland?