

Cultural Intelligence, The Key to a Successful Employee: From Monoculture to Interculturality in Contemporary Organizations

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Abstract: The context in today's society is characterized by an accelerated evolution of technology, means of communication, globalization, the dissolution of state borders, migration and intercultural partnerships, so that multicultural teams are both a constant and an imperative for the functioning of organizations. In light of these developments, intercultural sensitivity (IS) (Bennett, 1993) and cultural intelligence (CQ) (Ang, Dyne and Koh, 2006) have emerged as essential sets of skills for effectively navigating and adapting to these transformations. These skills include adaptability, openness to new experiences, an understanding of the values of different cultures, flexibility, empathy, impartiality, and the ability to adapt to diverse cultural contexts. This paper presents a comprehensive review of both conceptual and empirical studies on how workforce diversity is or can be managed. Consequently, the analysis presents the stages of evolution of intercultural sensitivity - monocultural orientation (denial, defense), the transition stage (minimization) and global orientation (acceptance, adaptation, integration), and how it can evolve into cultural intelligence. The findings of the studies suggest that cultural exposure plays a crucial role in the emergence and development of both abilities. It is essential to acknowledge that not all intercultural interactions facilitate this development. The impact of these experiences is influenced by various factors, including the nature and duration of the interactions, as well as the individual's commitment to understanding and leveraging those experiences effectively. Personality traits were also considered important, with extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness being linked to a greater willingness to engage in intercultural interactions, as well as a higher level of intercultural skills, IS, and CQ. Bennett's linear model of evolution (1993) serves as a foundational framework for comprehending the development of IS. This analysis, however, introduces an alternative perspective that more closely reflects the lived experiences of individuals involved in the process. Thus, the nature of intercultural interactions, along with individual differences, can contribute to non-linear evolutionary processes and, in certain instances, may even lead to involution. This analysis enhances understanding of how to cultivate and manage intercultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence at the organizational level. The study's findings contribute significantly to the literature and offer a framework for developing effective strategies and initiatives for managing cultural diversity, essential for navigating today's dynamic environment.

Keywords: Intercultural Sensitivity, Cultural Intelligence, Cultural Exposure, Globalization, Workforce Diversity

1. Introduction

In today's society, cultural diversity has become a daily reality because of the fact that "we live in a flat world" (Friedman, 2009, cited Sousa and Gonçalves, 2017, p. 90). The rapid technological advancements, the dissolution of state borders (Dusi, Messetti and Steinbach, 2014), the evolution of the economy from a local, national level to global markets, the development of franchise chains, and increased migration have fostered cultural exposure. Moreover, intercultural partnerships have developed in response to organizations' necessity to adapt to evolving economic trends and their aspirations for growth (Sousa and Goncalves, 2017). According to Giddens, we live in a fluid society, as globalization causes global processes to affect local social reality and vice versa (Giddens, 1991).

As a result of transnational partnerships, the merging of different organizations, and labour migration, we are experiencing a significant increase in diversity within the workforce as well as among customers, partners, and collaborators. This diversity encompasses various factors, including ethnicity, religion, cultural norms, and the languages spoken (Seymen, 2006). Consequently, intercultural teams are both a prevalent feature of modern organizations and an imperative for their successful operation. Given this ever-changing reality, employees and organizations must reconsider how they relate to the interactions and social contexts in which they are placed and adapt, as much as possible, to new trends (Yeke and Semerciöz, 2016)

In research and practice in the field of intercultural management, the interaction between systems of norms and values, communication, and action models from different cultures has been conceptualized as conflictual. This perspective is dominant in the specialized literature and is based on the transnational comparison model proposed by Hofstede (1980 cited in Thorrold, 2016), which assumes that a culture is unique, does not change over time, and contact with another culture generates negative effects embodied in costs (time, energy, money, etc.).

Thorrold proposed a synergic, complementary perspective that views cultural differences as valuable resources that, when effectively utilized, “can create a competitive advantage” (2016, p. 1878). By harmonizing various cultural elements within a hybrid structure, organizations can foster innovation, which is crucial for adding value and achieving success in a rapidly changing society. Empirical evidence has shown that the latter perspective is a much better predictor of the outcomes and effects of intercultural interactions, compared to the conflict approach, which does not take into account individual, situational differences and the fluid nature of cultural phenomena and elements (Thorrold, 2016). In support of this theory, studies show that organizations can use cultural diversity as a competitive advantage (Thorrold, 2016, Kulkarni, 2012), when managed effectively and can have a higher success rate in the market, especially in international projects (Matthews and Thankkar, 2012). The observed positive consequences include an enhanced ability to recruit and retain talent, improved problem-solving through diverse perspectives (Mazur, 2010), better alignment with the expectations of various customer categories (Adler, 1991 cited in Kulkarni, 2012), and greater adaptability to change (Morgan, 1989 cited in Kulkarni 2012).

Taking into account the large-scale metamorphoses in society, presented previously, as well as in relation to Thorrold's theory (2016), in order to understand how organizations can adapt and survive in the market, the present analysis aims to present and discuss some key concepts in intercultural management. Therefore, intercultural sensitivity (IS) (Bennett, 1986), intercultural competence (Byram and Zarate, 1997), cultural intelligence (CQ) (Ang, Dyne and Koh, 2006) and cultural exposure (Crown, 2008) are four interconnected concepts whose significance and applicability I will further discuss. Additionally, this study aims to address the following research question: *How can intercultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence be effectively developed and managed at the organizational level?*

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Intercultural Sensitivity

Intercultural sensitivity is “the experience of cultural differences, an experience that is dependent on the way a person constructs that difference” (Bennett, 1993, p.53). In other words, IS refers to the attitudes, ideas, and reactions that individuals have towards individuals different from them. According to his conceptualization, people with a high level of intercultural sensitivity (IS) adopt an ethnocultural approach, while those with a low level exhibit an ethnocentric perspective.

Bennett (1993) built a model of the development of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) that is based on the premise that this quality is not innate, but acquired through lifelong exposure to various behavioral models, perspectives, lifestyles, cultures, value systems, and social realities. Moreover, exposure is not sufficient to achieve IS, but must be complemented by an objective, ethno-relativist analysis and understanding of these realities (1993). Thus, if the individual was introduced to a new culture, but did not analyze the cultural elements and characteristics of that community, this experience will not contribute to the evolution of their level of IS. Given this perspective, Bennett proposes an evolution of IS that can be analyzed in three stages: monocultural orientation, transitional stage, and global orientation.

Table 1: The development model of intercultural sensitivity

Stage	Sub-stages	Definition	Examples
Monocultural orientation	Denial	Involves identifying a single reality and the inability to perceive cultural differences, <<individuals perceive themselves as more “real” than others - to the point where others may not even seem fully human>> (p.3).	A company at this stage may experience difficulty in solving conflicts because internal policies are insensitive to cultural differences.
	Defense	People perceive, identify cultural differences, but relate to the dichotomy of us-them, good-bad, and consider that these are the basis of the problems facing society.	Belief in the supremacy of the white race over other races (race hatred).
Transitional stage	Minimization	A neutral stage, one of tolerance, in which cultural differences are masked and similarities are highlighted, and contact with “others” is reduced to a minimum.	The belief in equal opportunities for employees often leads to frustration and conflicts

Stage	Sub-stages	Definition	Examples
			when the reality of the dominant culture emerges.
Global orientation	Acceptance	Individuals recognize that there may be cultures as complex as their own, but do not necessarily resonate with them, considering that they "are not good or bad, they simply are" (p. 5).	Although organizations may have policies that promote inclusion, there is no training in understanding cultural differences.
	Adaptation	Individuals can adapt to intercultural contexts; they can "experience the world as if they were part of a different culture" (p. 5), while still prioritizing their own culture.	A company that has reached this stage will not require a Muslim person to adhere to a dress code that requires wearing a skirt.
	Integration	At the highest level of ethno relativism, individuals see other cultures as equally valuable to their own and can collaborate effectively with them.	A company will combine the ideas of several groups, as it understands that this synergy can generate added value.

(Bennett, 2017)

According to Bennett (1993), DMIS is linear and progressive and Perry and Southwell (2011) claim that "each stage is moving deeper to a level of intercultural sensitivity" and "as each person experience or understanding of cultural difference became more complex, his/her potential for intercultural competence increases" (p. 454). Consequently, this viewpoint aligns with the approaches of certain researchers (Moore-Jones, 2018; Straffon, 2003), who suggest that IS serves as the foundation for further developing intercultural competence (IC).

However, Perry and Southwell (2011) question the progressivity and linearity of DMIS, highlighting individual differences in this evolution. According to their perspective, individual differences can give rise to diverse evolutionary patterns. The duration of each developmental stage may vary among individuals; some may bypass certain stages entirely, while others may experience involution because of the fact that the experiences they live have a high degree of complexity, and there is no fixed pattern. In support of this idea, Moore-Jones (2018) posits that individuals could be observed at different stages of evolution, contingent upon the specific context in which they are situated.

2.1.2 Intercultural Competence (IC) and Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

I previously noted that intercultural sensitivity is seen as the understructure of intercultural competence. Consequently, it is important to establish a clear conceptual distinction between the two in order to enhance understanding. Intercultural sensitivity (IS) is described in the literature as an internal phenomenon that refers to individuals' evaluations and attitudes toward cultural differences (Poort, Jansen and Hofman, 2023). Intercultural competence involves the actionable aspects: the ability to interact and live with cultures different from one's own (Guiheme, 2007), to have dual perspectives (Byram and Zarate, 1997), respect for those who are different, behavioral flexibility, and the necessary skills for managing intercultural interactions (Moore-Jones, 2018).

A high level of intercultural competence can underpin the development of cultural intelligence (CQ), which involves a more advanced set of skills and is described as "a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts." (Earley and Ang, 2003) by establishing frames of reference to understand specific cultural contexts and translating them into suitable reactions and behaviors (Poort, Jansen and Hofman, 2023). CQ is considered an advanced form of IC, as both share foundational components but differ in intensity, allowing for their interchangeable application (Poort, Jansen and Hofman, 2023). Therefore, in order to improve clarity and fluidity in the analysis, I will refer to this ability as cultural intelligence.

Cultural intelligence is a multidimensional construct comprising four sub-dimensions, which differs from one person to another in weight and intensity: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral. These sub-dimensions are defined and explained in the table below.

Table 2: Components of cultural intelligence

Sub-dimension	Explanation
Cognition	It involves knowledge of the norms, values, and practices of different cultures.
Metacognition	The capacity to understand the meaning of cultural differences and build an effective strategy to respond to them.
Motivational	Interest, motivation to adapt to cultural differences, and to function effectively in multicultural contexts.
Behavioral	The ability to act appropriately in specific multicultural contexts.

(Earley and Ang, 2003)

2.1.3 Cultural Exposure

In the discussion of IS and CQ an important factor is exposure, which Crown (2008) defines as “experiences related to a region that aid in developing a familiarity with or understanding of the norms, values, and beliefs of that region” (p. 393). In support of this idea, the findings of Sousa and Gonçalves' study show that expats have a higher level of CQ compared to non-expats (2017). According to Crown (2008) and Moore and Jones (2018), not every cultural contact contributes to the development of the two characteristics, as they differ in importance and duration. Traveling to different countries or watching foreign news programs does not have as strong an impact as moving to another country or traveling for business. Moreover, exposure does not seem to be sufficient; it must be accompanied by the individual's motivation to internalize and capitalize on that experience (Bennett, Janet M. and Bennett, Milton J, 2001; Yeke and Semerciok, 2016). Last but not least, cultural contact can enhance or hinder abilities depending on the characteristics of the context in which the individual is put (Benet-Martines and Oishi, 2008). Cultural exposure is associated with: a better understanding of cultural differences (Chen and Isa, 2003), the adoption of appropriate behavior, and better adaptation in the host country (Early and Ang, 2003), building trust in project teams (Wong *et al.*, 2008), intercultural competences and language proficiency (Poort, Jansen and Hofman, 2023).

2.1.4 Previous Research

Prior studies have linked IS and CQ to several characteristics that are crucial for organizational functioning and success in the current environment. Possessing those abilities favors adaptation to culturally diverse contexts, encourages creativity (Livermoore, 2011; Liu, Chen and Yao, 2011) and improves conflict and team management (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2015). CQ is also associated with positive attitudes such as life satisfaction, passion for work (Sousa and Gonçalves, 2017) and high performance (Thorrold, 2016). Moreover, according to Early (2002), “high CQ team member is more readily able to provide the types of behaviors and actions needed to maintain a productive multinational team environment.” (p. 290).

Individuals with high levels of CQ generally have a higher level of flexibility and adaptability, communication skills, and confidence in multicultural interactions (Early and Ang, 2003), they are extroverted, open to new experiences, exhibit an ethnorelative attitude (Leong, 2007), emotionally stable and culturally empathetic and have a high level of language proficiency (Sousa and Gonçalves, 2017). The latter is considered both an antecedent and a mediator of CQ (Poort, Jansen and Hofman, 2023).

Some studies that aimed to measure CQ have concluded that personality is an important factor in the emergence and development of CQ. Ang, Dyne and Koh (2006) measured the relation between personality traits from the Big Five Inventory and the four sub-categories of CQ and revealed positive associations between conscientiousness and metacognitive CQ, neuroticism and agreeableness with behavioral CQ, and openness with all four sub-dimensions. Moreover, personality traits have a contribution on intercultural communication (Bennett, 1998), with extrovert and open individuals having a high level of intercultural communication skills (Ramalu *et al.* 2010) and CQ (Duff, Tahbaz and Chan, 2012). This finding emphasizes the significance of individual personality traits in understanding and enhancing one's ability to navigate diverse cultural environments effectively (Poort, Jansen, and Hofman 2023).

2.2 The Metamorphosis of Organizational Strategies

Cultural diversity is an increasingly defining characteristic of today's organizational environment and society as a whole. According to Kulkarni (2012), the more culturally diverse a company is, the higher it scores on a number of specific indicators. These include: the ability to recruit and retain talent, a high ability to solve problems based on their distinct perspectives (Mazur, 2010), to meet the expectations of diverse customer groups (Adler, 1991, cited in Kulkarni, 2012), and to adapt easily to change (Morgan, 1989, cited in Kulkarni, 2012).

Historically, large organizations have often expected individuals from minority cultures to conform to the majority group's norms (Kulkarni, 2012, p. 267). This has led to a devaluation of cultural differences. However, the rise of globalization and the influence of movements advocating for equality and anti-discrimination have prompted a reassessment of cultural diversity. Recognizing the importance of embracing cultural diversity is now essential for fostering inclusive and effective organizations.

To effectively address diversity management needs, professionals from fields such as sociology, psychology, and education have developed theoretical frameworks that enhance our understanding of emerging trends. These frameworks have transformed perceptions of diversity, leading to strategies and policies that promote inclusion and appreciation of cultural differences (Bennet, Janet M. and Bennett, Milton J., 2001). Consequently, fostering cultural intelligence has become a key objective in many initiatives.

According to a recent study by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the majority of managers in the 68 countries surveyed recognize that intercultural management is a priority challenge on their agenda (Livermore and Van Dyne, 2015). However, identifying and accepting the challenge does not necessarily mean that they are prepared to deal with the new trends generated by a fluid society. Therefore, change must start from management, which, according to Barker (2015), has the responsibility to convince and motivate employees to recognize, understand, and respect cultural differences, as well as to develop their intercultural skills. The Coca-Cola Company acknowledges the significance of cultural intelligence as an essential competency for leaders in global markets. This skill enables leaders to adapt their operations to meet the cultural nuances and expectations of their audiences. Additionally, the company emphasizes the importance of developing this competency among all employees, as it is believed that "hotel and restaurant managers are more likely to form an opinion of the company based on the intercultural competence of the delivery driver rather than that of the general manager" (Livermore and Van Dyne, 2015, p. 18). This attitude is based on the belief that "Cultural intelligence is a critical skill for navigating today's increasingly global and diverse business environment" (Mortiz, cited in Livermore and Van Dyne, 2015, p. 2).

3. Discussions

This review aimed to present current perspectives on intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, and cultural exposure against the backdrop of the accelerated metamorphoses in organizations that we are witnessing.

I agree with the perspective of the researchers presented (Moore-Jones, 2018; Straffon, 2003), according to which IS, the cognitive, attitudinal component, serves as a starting point for the subsequent development of CQ, the behavioural component. In this context, cultural exposure (Crown, 2008) functions as both a mediator between the two stages and an important factor in amplifying the two abilities.

While Bennett's (1993) theoretical model, with its focus on linearity and progressiveness, provides valuable insights into the formation and development of IS and CQ, I find that the perspective offered by Perry and Southwell (2011) aligns more closely with the current realities observed in organizations and the labor market. In other words, I do not dispute that evolution is linear in many cases, but individual differences can have a decisive influence on its dynamics. Individual differences can be understood through personality traits, cultural background, type and duration of cultural exposure, and how the individual interprets these experiences. In the following sections, I will explain and analyse these individual differences for greater clarity.

Regarding personality traits, studies have concluded that traits such as extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness contribute to the emergence and development of IS (Bennett, 1998), CQ (Ang, Dyne and Koh, 2006; Duff, Tahbaz and Chan, 2012), as well as intercultural communication skills (Ramalu et al., 2010). In other words, individuals who possess these traits have a greater potential to adapt and perform effectively in intercultural interactions and to internalize these experiences, which will subsequently lead to the development of IS and CQ. At the organizational level, these conclusions can be used by management to make decisions

regarding hiring individuals or building work teams, especially for international projects, which could lead to increased efficiency.

The cultural background of origin could be an important factor in the emergence and development of IS and CQ, and I will support this premise with some examples. Individuals from Western Europe tend to exhibit a greater openness to change. This ethno-relativist attitude can be attributed to the region's high level of societal development, which has facilitated a substantial influx of immigrants and, consequently, has fostered a rich cultural diversity. In contrast, Eastern Europe comprises several developing countries, leading to fewer emigrants and limited opportunities for intercultural interactions. This situation may result in greater conservatism and ethnocentrism, along with reduced intercultural skills. Consequently, individuals may be more susceptible to culture shock, which can lead to an involution regarding IS and CQ.

In examining intercultural interactions, I align with Crown (2008) and Moore and Jones (2018), who assert that not all cultural exposure fosters intercultural sensitivity (IS) and cultural intelligence (CQ). Long-term experiences—such as studying abroad or participating in delegations—typically yield greater benefits than short-term encounters like vacations. Moreover, I believe that not only is the type and duration of the exposure important, but also the resources that individuals have at their disposal to capitalize on that experience. Managers should prioritize providing employees involved in intercultural interactions with the necessary resources and support to maximize benefits, such as language courses and intercultural training. Last but not least, it is important to note that mere exposure to intercultural experiences is not enough (Bennett, Janet M. and Bennett, Milton J., 2001; Yeke and Semerciok, 2016). Such exposure should be reinforced by the motivation of individuals to internalize and derive significant benefits from these experiences. This is where the importance of understanding and effectively managing individual differences comes into play.

The outcomes of prior research have underscored the relationship between IS and CQ with various variables that are vital for achieving organizational success. These refer to life satisfaction, passion for work (Sousa and Gonçalves, 2017), high performance (Thorrold, 2016), a higher level of flexibility and adaptability, communication skills, and confidence in multicultural interactions (Early and Ang, 2003), an ethno-relative attitude (Leong, 2007), a high level of language proficiency (Sousa and Gonçalves, 2017). Research (Thorrold, 2016, Kulkarni, 2012) indicates that effective management of cultural diversity can provide organizations with a competitive advantage, improving indicators as recruitment efficiency and stakeholder collaboration. Therefore, managing cultural diversity as well as developing IS and CQ should be on the list of priorities in the current context.

In the current context, it is imperative to prioritize the effective management of cultural diversity and the enhancement of cultural intelligence (CQ). I concur with Barker's perspective that initiatives and changes should be spearheaded by management. It is crucial for leadership to foster an environment where employees are encouraged to comprehend and appreciate intercultural differences, thereby facilitating the development of their intercultural competencies. This approach is a vital first step in transitioning from a monocultural to an intercultural orientation.

The present study represents a systematic review of the literature in the field of cultural diversity, which aims to provide a better understanding of how intercultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence can be developed and managed at the organizational level. The findings of this study contribute to the field's literature and offer a valuable framework for management to formulate strategies and initiatives for the effective management of cultural diversity. This approach is essential for successfully navigating the challenges of today's dynamic environment.

Ethics Declaration

In undertaking this study, I maintained strict adherence to the principles of academic integrity, ensuring that all sources were cited following the Harvard referencing style.

AI Declaration

The only AI tool utilized in this work was Grammarly, which was used solely to correct spelling errors.

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