The Influence of Cultural Intelligence on Immigrant Employees' Job Satisfaction and Discrimination

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Abstract: Immigration has become an increasingly significant global phenomenon, playing an important role in the Portuguese context. In this regard, it is essential to understand how immigrants adapt and integrate into the Portuguese labour market as well as to identify the variables that may positively or negatively influence this process. Problems and obstacles, such as discrimination, are observed for immigrants in the workplace. Discrimination is when people are treated differently because of their group membership. Cultural intelligence is a person's ability to understand, respect, and adapt to different cultures, adjusting to language, values, and behaviours. This competence allows one to recognise cultural diversity and use it strategically to interact effectively in culturally diverse environments (Ang et al., 2007; Takdir et al., 2020). Job satisfaction can be understood as an individual's perception of their professional experience, including team integration, job performance, and overall well-being in the work environment (Bal & Kokalan, 2022; Warr et al., 1979). The main objective of this study is to understand how cultural intelligence influences job satisfaction and discrimination according to immigrant employees'perceptions in the North of Portugal. A survey was conducted. To assess cultural intelligence, the Cultural Intelligence Scale, developed by Ang et al. (2007), was used. Its objective is to measure an individual's ability to adapt and interact effectively in culturally diverse contexts. The job satisfaction measurement scale was developed by Warr et al. (1979) and consists of 15 items to assess an individual's level of satisfaction with various aspects of their work environment, including their job function, relationships with colleagues and superiors, working conditions, and other factors. Based on the analysis of data collected from a sample of 161 immigrants, the results of simple linear regression indicate that cultural intelligence significantly influences job satisfaction and discrimination. Specifically, there is a positive relationship between cultural intelligence and job satisfaction, and a negative relationship between cultural intelligence and perceived workplace discrimination. Some implications for Management, particularly Human Resources Management, were made and presented.

Keywords: Cultural intelligence, Discrimination, Immigrant employees, Job satisfaction

1. Introduction

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reported that more than 281 million people worldwide were involved in migration-related movements in 2024 (IOM, 2024). Among European destinations, Portugal and Spain stand out as key receiving countries, both showing a notable rise in the share of foreign residents compared to their native populations (Ennes et al., 2018). Within Portugal's immigrant communities, Brazilians and nationals from the portuguese-speaking African countries (known by the acronym PALOP — Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa) form a particularly notable group, linked to Portugal through a common language, a shared colonial history, and strong cultural connections.

Data from the 2024 Migration and Asylum Report show that the municipality of Braga was home to 28,538 immigrants, the majority of whom were Brazilian nationals.

This topic was chosen given the growing relevance of migrant employees to the labour markets of host nations. Immigrant communities play a key part in reinforcing local economies, helping to address labour gaps in specific industries and regions. Through this contribution, immigrant employees help revitalise and add dynamism to the areas where they live and work. Recognising and valuing this workforce is therefore essential to supporting broader economic and social development (Peri, 2016). Equally important is the promotion of equal treatment and mutual respect for all individuals, irrespective of background or cultural origin, so that fairness in opportunity and treatment is upheld for everyone.

Despite the challenges, it is essential that immigrant employees feel satisfied in their jobs. It is therefore extremely important to address the concept of job satisfaction in this study. Job satisfaction is understood as

how an employee feels about their job, the working environment, the salary, the colleagues and other factors (Wang and Jing, 2017).

The costs of absenteeism and of replacing an employee when they decide to leave the organisation are high and compromise organisational performance. Given that the immigrant workforce is crucial to addressing labour shortages, it is imperative to understand which factors may affect job satisfaction.

The social experiences of immigrants can have a significant impact on job satisfaction and how they perceive their work. In an organisation with a multicultural workforce, cultural intelligence is essential amongst employees to foster job satisfaction and to reduce workplace discrimination. Among these factors, cultural intelligence stands out, defined as an individual's ability to function effectively in distinct cultural contexts and adapt to different multicultural environments (Takdir et al., 2020).

The main objective of this study is to analyse the influence of immigrants' cultural intelligence on job satisfaction and perceptions of worplace discrimination.

2. Background

2.1 Cultural Intelligence

The common belief that cultural differences are becoming less significant due to globalisation is not always correct (Siripipatthanakul et al., 2023).

The concept of cultural intelligence is defined as the ability to operate effectively in different cultural contexts (Alifuddin and Widodo, 2022; Siripipatthanakul et al., 2023; Takdir et al., 2020). This concept has attracted the attention of researchers and professionals because it is a relevant topic and is directly linked to globalisation, international management and diversity management in the workplace (Bal and Kokalan, 2022; Puzzo et al., 2024).

Cultural intelligence is characterised by an individual's ability to adapt to different cultural environments, relating to different ethnic groups, nationalities and other distinct forms of culture (Ang et al., 2007). Cultural intelligence encompasses a range of behaviours and skills, such as knowledge of foreign languages and the presence in an individual of values such as tolerance, flexibility and acceptance, which facilitate relationships with people from other cultures (Van Dyne et al., 2010).

Cultural intelligence is a multidimensional concept comprising four types of intelligence: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioural. Metacognitive cultural intelligence reflects a person's cultural awareness during interactions with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Cognitive intelligence relates to an individual's knowledge of specific rules and practices in new cultural contexts. Motivational intelligence reflects an individual's desire to learn effectively in diverse cultural contexts. The final dimension, behavioural intelligence, is characterised by an individual's ability to adapt and demonstrate culturally appropriate behaviour when interacting with people from other cultures (Earley and Ang, 2003; Siripipatthanakul et al., 2023; Van Dyne et al., 2012).

2.2 Job Satisfaction

An employee is considered satisfied with their job when their overall attitude towards it is positive (Bal and Kokalan, 2022; Wang and Jing, 2017; Warr et al., 1979). This satisfaction encompasses relationships with managers and colleagues, as well as the working environment, the organisation of work, the management policies of the company in which they work, the technology used, organisational performance and economic and financial factors, such as salary and remuneration (Takdir et al., 2020; Vieira et al., 2023; Wang and Jing, 2017).

Factors such as a positive working environment that aligns with the cultural values of migrant workers can contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction (Ashraf and Sahni, 2024; Bal and Kokalan, 2022; Wang and Jing, 2017).

Job satisfaction is positively correlated with factors such as organisational commitment, trust in a particular organisation, organisational behaviour, and corporate culture. However, satisfaction – or a lack thereof – is also linked to negative aspects such as absenteeism and high staff turnover (Takdir et al., 2020; Wang and Jing, 2017).

2.3 Workplace Discrimination

Discrimination occurs when individuals are treated unequally based on the group they belong to, and it is generally understood as a harmful phenomenon that leads to disadvantage, exclusion, restricted opportunities, or unfair treatment (Lopes, 2024).

While often used interchangeably, prejudice and discrimination represent distinct concepts. Prejudice is an attitude with multiple components: a cognitive dimension (stereotyping), an emotional dimension (feelings toward the group), and a behavioural dimension (which can translate into discriminatory acts). Discrimination, by contrast, refers specifically to observable actions that produce exclusion, limit opportunities, hinder integration, or result in inequitable treatment (Lopes, 2024). Within the workplace context, this can take the form of assigning lower-status positions to members of a particular group or paying unequal wages to employees carrying out identical work. Such practices undermine successful integration into the workplace and diminish employees' overall job satisfaction (Lopes, 2024).

2.4 The Influence of Cultural Intelligence on Job Satisfaction and Workplace Discrimination

Cultural intelligence is an essential concept for understanding fundamental aspects such as strategy, motivation, performance and effective adaptation in culturally diverse contexts. As such, it serves as a valuable tool for job satisfaction in culturally diverse environments (Ashraf and Sahni, 2024; Bal and Kokalan, 2022). Cultural intelligence plays a key role in job satisfaction and is a determining factor in the quality of the organisational environment. Employees with high cultural intelligence tend to be more motivated to overcome challenges, adapt to new contexts and interact effectively with people from different cultures. These characteristics contribute significantly to their job satisfaction (Bal and Kokalan, 2022; Takdir et al., 2020). The ability to understand and adapt to organisational differences facilitates integration and collaboration in the workplace.

Immigrants with a high level of cultural intelligence have a greater understanding of cultural differences, which reduces conflicts and improves interactions between colleagues from different cultures. This contributes to a more satisfying working environment and higher professional performance. Conversely, immigrants with lower levels of cultural intelligence may find it difficult to understand different attitudes and values, which can lead to lower job satisfaction (Takdir et al., 2020). In multicultural organisational settings, employees with greater cultural intelligence demonstrate greater resilience and adaptability, fostering a more dynamic environment (Takdir et al., 2020). Furthermore, these employees are more likely to set clear objectives and achieve better performance, which leads to positive outcomes for the organisation. As they strive to improve the corporate environment and achieve organisational success, these employees also increase their own job satisfaction (Takdir et al., 2020). Employees with a greater ability to understand and adapt to different cultural contexts tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction (Bal and Kokalan, 2022; Takdir et al., 2020).

Discrimination is directly linked to job satisfaction. In organisational contexts where this phenomenon occurs, it becomes particularly difficult to achieve job satisfaction, as discrimination has a negative impact in this area (Amaram, 2007). In the labour market, the discrimination perceived by immigrants often manifests itself through unequal treatment compared with colleagues of other nationalities or cultures. These situations of injustice create inequalities between immigrant and native workers, undermining the creation of a more inclusive working environment (Dietz et al., 2015). Employees with a higher level of cultural intelligence, in culturally diverse environments, can develop a greater sense of belonging to the group and, consequently, reduce their sense of discrimination (Yao & Arif, 2024; Shore et al., 2009).

Consequently, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: *Cultural intelligence is positively related to immigrant employees' job satisfaction.*

H2: *Cultural intelligence is negatively related to immigrant employees' perceptions of discrimination.*

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The convenience sample is composed of 161 migrants (n=161). The most represented age group in the sample is 30- 39 years old (46,58%), followed by the 18–29 age group (32,92%). Regarding gender, 56,52% are male and 43,48% are female.

The sample is predominantly composed of Brazilian migrants (n=97, 60,2%), with a smaller representation of PALOP migrants (n=9, 5,6%) and other nationalities (n=55, 34,2%), including Venezuelan, Ukrainian, Bangladeshi, German-Indian, Swedish, Ecuadorian, and Bolivian respondents.

3.2 Measures

To assess cultural intelligence, the Cultural Intelligence Scale, developed by Ang et al. (2007), was used. The original scale comprises 20 items spread across the four dimensions of cultural intelligence: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural. In the present study, 18 of the 20 original items were used. It is important to emphasise that, in this study, the dimension of cultural intelligence will be analysed as a whole, following the approach taken in other similar studies (Bal and Kokalan, 2022; Takdir et al., 2020).

The job satisfaction measurement tool was developed by Warr et al. (1979) and comprises 15 items that measure individuals' satisfaction with various aspects of their working environment, including the role they perform, their relationships with colleagues and superiors, and working conditions, among other factors. In addition to these 15 items, the scale also includes a separate item – also used in this study – which allows respondents to assess their overall job satisfaction. 11 of the 15 items from the original scale were used.

To measure workplace discrimination, the Everyday Discrimination Scale, developed by Williams et al. (1997), was used. The scale was adapted to the workplace context, retaining 7 items that best reflected the organisational context.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

Prior to the correlation and regression analyses, descriptive statistics and reliability analyses were conducted to evaluate the cultural intelligence and job satisfaction scales. Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated using IBM SPSS Statistics to assess the reliability of the measurement scales.

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis - cultural intelligence

The mean score for cultural intelligence was 5,24 on the seven-point scale (SD = ,933), indicating moderate variability, indicating moderate variability in participants' responses. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of ,937 (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis - Cultural Intelligence

Cultural Intelligence	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
	161	*5,24*	*,933*	*,937*

These findings confirm that the cultural intelligence scale demonstrated excellent internal reliability.

4.1.2 Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis - job satisfaction

Participants reported a mean job satisfaction score of 5,23 on the seven-point scale (SD = 1,166), suggesting a moderate degree of variability across responses. The job satisfaction scale also demonstrated excellent internal consistency, as reflected by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of ,954 (Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis - Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
	161	*5.23*	*1,166*	*,954*

4.1.3 Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis - workplace discrimination

Following reverse coding, workplace discrimination scores ranged from 0 to 5. Participants reported a mean score of,82 (SD = ,992), indicating relatively low perceived workplace discrimination with moderate variability across responses. The scale also demonstrated excellent internal consistency, as reflected by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of ,912 (Table 3).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis - Workplace Discrimination

Workplace Discrimination	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
	161	,82	,992	,912

The scale was reverse coded prior to analysis so that higher scores reflected higher levels of perceived workplace discrimination, consistent with the original coding procedure described by Williams et al. (1997).

4.2 Correlations and Regression Analysis

4.2.1 Correlations and regression analysis between cultural intelligence and job satisfaction

The initial Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant association between cultural intelligence and job satisfaction (r = ,347, *p* < ,001).

Table 4: Pearson Correlation between Cultural Intelligence and Job Satisfaction

	Cultural Intelligence	Job Satisfaction
Cultural Intelligence	_	_
Job Satisfaction	,347**	_

** p < ,001

This finding suggests that immigrant employees with higher levels of cultural intelligence generally reported greater job satisfaction (Table 4).

Before fitting the regression model, the data were examined for influential cases. Two observations (7 and 90) were identified as outliers because they produced the largest residuals and had the potential to affect the regression estimates. Observation 7 had a residual of 3,603, with a cultural intelligence score of 1, well below the sample mean (5,24), and a job satisfaction score of 7, above the sample mean (5,23). Observation 90 showed the opposite pattern, with a residual of −4,662, a cultural intelligence score of 7, and a job satisfaction score of 1. As these cases represented extreme and contrasting response patterns, they were excluded from the subsequent analyses to improve the robustness of the model.

After excluding the two outliers, the correlation between cultural intelligence and job satisfaction increased to r = ,478 (p < ,001), indicating a stronger positive association after the data were screened for influential cases (Table 5).

Table 5: Pearson Correlation between Cultural Intelligence and Job Satisfaction (No Outliers)

	Cultural Intelligence	Job Satisfaction
Cultural Intelligence	_	_
Job Satisfaction	,478**	_

** p < ,001

The regression analysis was then performed using the remaining 159 participants. Cultural intelligence emerged as a significant positive predictor of job satisfaction (β = ,478, t = 6,811, p < ,001), indicating that higher levels of cultural intelligence were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among immigrant employees.

Table 6 presents the regression coefficients. The unstandardised coefficient (B = ,615) indicates that, on average, job satisfaction increases by ,615 units for each one-unit increase in cultural intelligence.

The regression equation is therefore:

Job Satisfaction = 2,017 + ,615 × Cultural Intelligence

Table 6: Regression Analysis between *Job Satisfaction* and *Cultural Intelligence*.

	Non padronized coefficients		Padronized coefficients	*t*	*p*
Model	**B**	**standard error**	**Beta**		
constant	2,017	,481		4,194	<,001
Cultural Intelligence	,615	,090	,478	6,811	<,001

Dependent variable: Job Satisfaction

Taken together, the correlation and regression analyses provide support for Hypothesis 1 by demonstrating a positive and statistically significant relationship between cultural intelligence and job satisfaction among immigrant employees. Employees with higher cultural intelligence consistently reported greater job satisfaction.

4.2.2 Correlations and regression analysis between cultural intelligence and workplace discrimination

Cultural intelligence and workplace discrimination showed a low-to-moderate, negative, and statistically significant correlation in an initial analysis (r = -,237, p < ,001). This finding indicates that immigrant employees with higher cultural intelligence tended to report experiencing less discrimination in the workplace (Table 7).

Table 7: Pearson Correlation between Cultural Intelligence and Workplace Discrimination

	Cultural Intelligence	Job Satisfaction
Cultural Intelligence	_	_
Workplace Discrimination	-,237**	_

** p < ,001

Prior to the regression analysis, the assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, and the absence of influential observations were assessed. Several influential cases were identified during this process.

Four successive regression analyses led to the identification of ten outliers (cases 4, 7, 35, 79, 90, 111, 112, 142, 143, and 150), which displayed response patterns that differed substantially from those observed in the remainder of the sample. Consequently, these cases were excluded from the final model.

Following the exclusion of these observations, the correlation coefficient increased to r = -,279 (p < ,001) (Table 8), indicating a stronger negative association between cultural intelligence and workplace discrimination.

Table 8: Pearson Correlation between Cultural Intelligence and Workplace Discrimination (No Outliers)

	Cultural Intelligence	Job Satisfaction
Cultural Intelligence	_	_
Workplace Discrimination	-,279**	_

** p < ,001

The regression model was then re-estimated using the remaining observations. Cultural intelligence emerged as a significant predictor of workplace discrimination (β = -,279; t = -3,540; p < ,01).

The unstandardized coefficient (B = -,216) indicates that each one-unit increase in cultural intelligence is associated with a ,216-unit decrease in workplace discrimination, meaning individuals with higher cultural intelligence tend to report lower levels of perceived discrimination (Table 9)

The model equation is therefore:

Workplace Discrimination = 1,767 – ,216 × Cultural Intelligence

Table 9: Regression Analysis between Workplace Discrimination and Cultural Intelligence.

	Non padronized coefficients		Padronized coefficients	*t*	*p*
Model	**B**	**standard error**	**Beta**		
Constant	1,767	,324		5,448	<,001
Cultural Intelligence	-,216	,061	-,279	-3,540	<,001

Dependent variable: Workplace Discrimination

Collectively, the correlation and regression analyses support Hypothesis 2 by indicating that cultural intelligence is negatively associated with workplace discrimination. Employees with higher cultural intelligence tended to report lower workplace discrimination.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Cultural intelligence may be defined as an individual's capacity to comprehend, respect, and adapt to distinct cultures through the adjustment of language use, values and behavioural patterns. This competence facilitates the recognition of cultural diversity and its strategic application, thereby enabling effective interaction within culturally diverse environments (Takdir et al., 2020). Within the organisational context, cultural intelligence assumes a crucial role insofar as it facilitates individuals' integration into the organisation. Moreover, it has been associated with direct and positive effects on job satisfaction (Bal and Kokalan, 2022).

Job satisfaction can be understood as an individual's perception of their professional experience, including their integration into the team, the performance of their duties and, more generally, their well-being in the workplace (Bal and Kokalan, 2022; Wang and King, 2017). Job satisfaction is closely linked to motivation to perform one's duties and to well-being in the workplace. Among the various factors influencing job satisfaction, cultural intelligence stands out, as it enables employees to adapt more effectively to diverse contexts and to interact in culturally diverse settings. It is essential to consider cultural intelligence as a factor that can enhance job satisfaction; employees with a greater ability to understand and respect cultural differences – that is, those possessing cultural intelligence – tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction (Ashraf and Sahni, 2024). Therefore, cultural intelligence in the workplace appears to be a highly useful skill in helping employees feel more satisfied at work, according to the literature (Ashraf and Sahni, 2024; Jiang et al., 2018; Takdir et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 1 examines the relationship between cultural intelligence and job satisfaction among immigrant employees. The hypothesis posits that immigrant employees with a higher level of cultural intelligence demonstrate greater job satisfaction. The results, obtained using Pearson's correlation and simple linear regression, confirm this hypothesis. A significant positive relationship is observed, supporting the hypothesis and reinforcing previous evidence regarding the importance of cultural intelligence for job satisfaction (Takdir et al., 2020).

Cultural intelligence contributes to greater integration and helps reduce feelings of discrimination in diverse work groups (Alexandraa et al., 2021). For minorities, such as immigrant employees, who face discrimination in various workplace situations, cultural intelligence acts as a supportive factor, as it helps individuals to adapt and consequently increases their job satisfaction (Le et al., 2016).

Hypothesis 2 examines the relationship between cultural intelligence and workplace discrimination among immigrant employees. The hypothesis posits that immigrant employees with a higher level of cultural intelligence demonstrate lower perceptions of discrimation. The results, obtained using Pearson's correlation and simple linear regression, confirm this hypothesis.

According to Yao and Arif (2024), a high level of cultural intelligence enables individuals to recognise and overcome discriminatory situations through better cultural and linguistic adaptation within an organisational context. Furthermore, employees with a higher level of cultural intelligence are able to identify similarities with other colleagues, even in culturally diverse environments. This can lead to a greater sense of belonging to the group and, consequently, reduce feelings of discrimination and/or exclusion (Shore et al., 2009; Yao and Arif, 2024).

In line with the findings, it is worth reflecting on the role of HRM in reducing discrimination and increasing job satisfaction amongst migrant workers. Managing cultural diversity is essential to avoid discriminatory situations (Shore et al., 2009) and to promote greater job satisfaction (Xia et al., 2022).

Each organisation has its own culture and integration methods (Abrantes et al., 2021), and it is vital that HRM understands how to optimise these processes. It is therefore important to develop practices that prevent discrimination and promote job satisfaction. This gives rise to solutions such as providing training to foster an understanding of other cultures, as well as awareness-raising initiatives on the importance of cultural diversity (Edewor and Aluko, 2007; Patrick and Kumar, 2012).

HR professionals can directly influence job satisfaction and reduce perceptions of discrimination. These professionals should supervise management practices and be aware of the organisational climate in order to promote a more satisfying working environment. In contexts where such support is lacking, the likelihood of feelings of exclusion and discrimination increases. Furthermore, strategies such as mentoring by colleagues or line managers, particularly for employees who are new to the organisation or the country, contribute to their inclusion in a more positive way (Patrick and Kumar, 2012).

Given that cultural intelligence has been shown to influence job satisfaction, it is important to understand how this competence can be fostered within an organisational context. Assessing the level of cultural intelligence during the recruitment process, using appropriate tools, can facilitate integration and adaptability to the organisational culture. It is essential that HRM understands how to assess the cultural intelligence of an immigrant individual and how this can benefit the organisation. Candidates with a higher level of this competence tend to adapt more easily to the workplace, as they are able to understand and interact effectively with people from different cultures and in culturally diverse contexts (Jiang et al., 2018). Thus, assessing cultural intelligence at the selection or recruitment stage can be a very important step.

One of the study's limitations was the homogeneity of the sample, which consisted predominantly of Brazilian and PALOP immigrants. Immigrants of other nationalities were under-represented.

Future studies should include cultural intelligence as an individual variable that may act as a mediator between workplace discrimination and job satisfaction. It is also suggested that the relationship between cultural intelligence and discrimination be analysed in conjunction with other factors, including socio-demographic variables, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence perceptions of discrimination. Such approaches could contribute to more effective and inclusive organisational strategies in the workplace for immigrant employees. Studies involving larger samples are also needed.

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