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Determinants of Cultural Intelligence of Public Enterprise Executives

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Abstract

Cultural intelligence (CQ) has emerged as a crucial competency for public enterprise executives navigating culturally diverse environments. This study aims to explore the determinants of CQ among public enterprise executives in Namibia. A survey was conducted with 55 respondents, and data were analysed using confirmatory factor analysis and ordinary least squares regression. The findings reveal that age and experience are positively associated with CQ, while gender and languages spoken are not significant predictors. Visits to countries outside Africa and residence abroad, both within and outside Africa, are positively related to CQ. The study highlights the importance of exposure to culturally distant countries in enhancing executives' CQ. The results have implications for the selection, training, and development of public enterprise leaders. Further research is needed to establish external consistency and examine the longitudinal effects of various factors on CQ development. This study contributes to the understanding of CQ determinants in the context of public enterprises and offers insights into fostering this essential competency among executives.

KEYWORDS: Cultural intelligence, Multiple intelligences, CI, CQ.

Introduction

In today's increasingly globalized business environment, the ability to effectively navigate and adapt to diverse cultural contexts has become a critical competency for organizational leaders. This is particularly true for executives in public enterprises, who often face the challenges of managing a workforce and serving stakeholders from various cultural backgrounds. Cultural intelligence (CQ) has emerged as a crucial attribute that enables individuals to function effectively in cross-cultural settings. CQ refers to an individual's capability to understand, adapt, and thrive in culturally diverse environments (Earley & Ang, 2003).

The importance of cultural intelligence for public enterprise executives cannot be overstated. These leaders are responsible for guiding their organizations through complex

cultural landscapes, both internally and externally. They must be able to foster inclusive work environments, build relationships with diverse stakeholders, and make strategic decisions that consider cultural nuances. Consequently, understanding the determinants of cultural intelligence among public enterprise executives is of paramount importance.

This paper aims to explore the key factors that influence the cultural intelligence of public enterprise executives. By examining the individual, organizational, and environmental determinants of CQ, we can gain valuable insights into how to cultivate and enhance this essential competency. The findings of this study will have significant implications for the selection, training, and development of public enterprise leaders, as well as for the overall effectiveness of public organizations in navigating cultural diversity.

Multiple intelligences

Nineteenth century attempts by English polymaths like Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton to classify people into intelligence groups did not meet with success and attempts to make a standardized test were abandoned. When French Alfred Binet, Victor Henri, and Théodore Simon released the Binet-Simon test in 1905, they had more success (Wolf, 1973). William Stern (1912) coined the abbreviation IQ for the German term *Intelligenzquotient*, which he used to refer to a method of assessing intelligence tests.

A number of meta-analytic evaluations have shown that general intelligence tests are reliable indicators of work performance across a wide range of occupations. IQ tests have evolved over time and IQ testing has developed into a huge enterprise. Now the tests are easy to administer and some experts claim to do it in minutes over the telephone or online (Richardson, 2022). The idea of IQ measurement being so easy seems unconvincing when even laypersons would recognize that intelligence is bound to be complex, enigmatic and perhaps indescribable, being probably the most intricate mental function ever evolved.

While scientists were working to improve IQ tests, Howard Gardner (1983) published his renowned book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, which generated much controversy. Gardner distinguished several types of intelligence, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligence, rather than viewing intelligence as a single, all-inclusive capacity. The theory has been subject of criticism by mainstream scholars (e.g., Waterhouse, 2006) for its lack of empirical evidence, and reliance on subjective judgement. Psychometric studies have consistently discovered high correlations between different elements of intelligence, rather than the modest correlations predicted by Gardner's hypothesis, bolstering the general intelligence theory over multiple intelligences. Gardner has been defending his theory through

rebuttals in academic journals (Gardner & Moran, 2006) and sequels to his book (Gardner, 1993; 2000).

Another book that upended the IQ theory was published twelve years after Gardner's well-known work. The subtitle of Daniel Goleman's (1995) book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*, suggests that he had a negative opinion of the entire psychometric tradition. According to the author, the set of skills and aptitudes that deal with people and emotions has mainly been ignored. Goleman placed special emphasis on the value of being aware of one's own emotional life, controlling emotions, comprehending others' emotions, cooperating with others, and having empathy for others. The author explains how to improve these abilities. With its hopeful message, the book turned out to be an international sensation that spent over a year on the New York Times bestseller list and sold millions of copies around the world. It is perhaps the best-selling social science book of all time. The author contends that the world would be a better place if we deliberately nurtured emotional intelligence (EQ) as we do cognitive intelligence.

The idea of social Intelligence (SQ), which dates back to Edward Lee Thorndike's (1920) study, was revived as a result of research on multiple intelligences. Thorndike described it as the capacity to understand others and act and behave sensibly in relationships with them. Social intelligence (SQ) as a concept had sporadic development and turned out to be a late bloomer. SQ is the capacity to get along with others, social knowledge, ease with others, empathy for others, and insight into others' viewpoints. The term SQ refers to a broad category of social interaction abilities. In essence, high SQ symbolizes a person's ability to take action, such as collaborating and problem-solving with others.

Cultural intelligence

The term cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a relatively new concept. The concept has its roots in Gardner's concept of Interpersonal intelligence (ability to recognize and respond adequately to other people's moods, motives, and desires) and EQ and takes self-awareness and other-awareness further ahead referring to one's ability to adapt to new cultural environments depending on a variety of factors such as cognitive, motivational, and behavioral characteristics. Intending to expand the understanding of intercultural interactions, P. Christopher Earley (2002) introduced CQ as an intellectual construct that represents adaption to various cultural situations. He further refined it with Soon Ang, giving a conceptual framework for examining the connection between organizational behavior, culture, and human intelligence. According to Earley and Ang (2003), people participate cross-culturally with varying degrees of success depending on their level of CQ. David Thomas and Kerr Inkson

(2004) worked on a complementary framework of (CQ) during the same time period, outlining a three-stage method for improving one's CQ. The process entails learning the fundamentals of cross-cultural interactions, such as what cultures are, how they differ, and how they affect behavior; engaging in mindfulness practices and paying attention to cues in a reflective and creative way; and building a behavioral skill set that can be applied to a variety of contexts (Thomas & Kerr, 2017). Moreover, people with high CQ tend to be open, empathetic, supportive and positive and to understand equality in fostering communication with students from various cultural backgrounds (DeVito 2021).

It is important to recognize that CQ is not an adaptation of EQ or SQ. While EQ researchers do not explicitly limit their models to being culture bound, they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural context and how the notion could be expanded to encompass it (Putranto et al., 2018). The formulations of SQ are relatively void of cultural richness and SQ demonstrates an ability to assess and manage others presuming universality of content and processes. Since ecological and social forces impact thought process, emotion and behavior, the universalist stance of SQ could seem unwarranted. This is not to say that all psychological processes are culture-bound. However, etic aspects of CQ reflect general cognitive abilities that can be used in a variety of situations (Toves, 2022). CQ is distinct from stable personality traits which describe what a person typically does across time and across situations (Costa and McCrae, 1992). As an individual difference capability, CQ refers to what a person can do to be effective in culturally diverse settings (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). CQ refers to one’s competence for effective adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings in new cultural context and to deal with people whose cultural background is different.

Metacognition, cognition, motivation, and behavior are the four components that make up CQ (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Metacognitive CQ, reflects the level of conscious cultural awareness of an individual during cross-cultural interactions. Cognitive CQ reflects the degree to which an individual knows and understands norms, practices, and conventions in different cultures. Motivational CQ reflects an individual’s interest, confidence, and drive to adapt cross-culturally. Behavioral CQ entails developing a versatile repertoire of behavioral responses that are suitable in several situations, as well as the ability to change both verbal and nonverbal actions depending on the people involved in a particular interaction or cultural context. CQ is an aggregate multidimensional construct; its four dimensions being qualitatively different facets of the overall capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings (Earley and Ang, 2003). Since temperament influences choice of behaviors and experiences,

some personality traits are related to CQ (Asthana, 1997). Consistent with this premise, Ang et al. (2006) have shown discriminant validity of the four dimensions of CQ after comparing them with the big five personality traits.

These four dimensions of CQ are suited to the structure of present-day intelligence models that have multifaceted, and individual characteristics (Ang et al., 2020). Frameworks and measures that includes subdimensions for each element also exist, but they have not received much attention to far (Anathuri et al., 2022; O'Donnell, 2023).

CQ is a culture-free etic construct not linked with academic intelligence (Ng and Earley, 2006). CQ is conceptualized as a set of competencies that can be increased over time and independently from the situation (Earley and Peterson, 2004). There is some evidence that practice of yoga may improve CQ (Asthana & Asthana, 2012). Though there is not yet any meta-analytic research on training interventions specifically for improving CQ, such interventions have been tried on experimental basis (e.g., Azevedo & Shane, 2019; Desai et al., 2018). General recommendations are that the training should focus on competencies in all four aspects of CQ, using methods that are aligned with the desired outcomes (Earley & Ang, 2003). Though there is preliminary evidence that CQ can be improved through deliberate instruction, more extensive research is required to show whether the results are ephemeral (e.g., useful for preparing people for the forthcoming trip abroad) or long lasting.

This research focusses on public sector executives in Namibia. The country gained independence from South Africa in 1990 and the public sector was expanded to control the commanding hieghts of the economy. Several executives were trained at International Center for Public Enterprises in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Not withstanding recent efforts towards privatisation, public enterprises still play an important part in various sectors of country's economy including transport, telecommunications, and energy.

Research Methods

Public sector executives in Namibia were given a survey to complete in order to gather the data for this study. Total number of respondents was 55 (female = 25; male = 30; others = 0). 24 respondents were from the country's capital. Mean age and working experience (in years) were 48.5 (sd 11.8) and 18.5 (sd 12.9) respectively. Mean of languages spoken by the respondents was 4.0 (sd 0.7).

The Cultural Intelligence Scale, a 20-item scale, is most frequently used to measure it (Ang et al., 2007). Thinking about thinking, or metacognition, is the awareness and comprehension of one's own intellectual processes. It pertains to ideas around the acquisition and application of cultural knowledge in this setting. Examples of statements like these are "I

am aware of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural relationships" and "I verify the veracity of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures". Item types like "I know the legal and economic systems of various cultures" and "I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages" are used to measure cognition, which is more specialized cultural knowledge. The motivational component is the readiness to explore and participate in cross-cultural encounters. The statements "I enjoy engaging with individuals from diverse cultures" and "I am confident that I can communicate with locals in a culture that is unknown to me" are examples of response choices. The behavior element, which focuses on acting appropriately, is evaluated using questions like "I vary my facial expressions when a cross-cultural contact necessitates it" and "I change my vocal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when it is necessary".

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed where the specified model consisted of metacognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ and behavioral CQ items loading onto their corresponding CQ components, and all CQ components loading onto an overall CQ construct. This second order CQ factor model had sufficient fit with $\chi 2 = 449$, $p=0.000$, comparative fit index = 0.884 and root- mean-square error of approximation = 0.079. All unadjusted Variance inflation factor values were below the proposed cut-off of 2.4, indicating that collinearity is unlikely to have influenced the results.

The reliability of the CQS overall in this study was high (=0.91), as were the reliability of each of its four components: the metacognitive CQ (=0.83), the cognitive CQ (=0.84), the motivational CQ (=0.78), and the behavioral CQ (=0.81), all of which had values above the Paul Kline's (2000) recommended cut-off point of 0.7. To guarantee equitable weighting when computing the total CQ score, an average score was produced for each CQ component. Table 1 displays the means from this study for overall CQ and each of the four CQ components.

Table 1

CQ component scores

CQ Component	Mean (SD)
Metacognitive	5.32 (0.95)
Cognitive	4.24 (1.01)
Motivational	5.27 (0.93)
Behavioral	4.93 (0.94)

Various factors hypothesized to influence these components of CQ, i.e., the independent variables are defined in Table 2.

Table 2

Description of independent variable

Variable	Description
Location	Employed at capital city = 1; otherwise = 0
Gender	Female = 1; otherwise = 0
Age	In years
Experience	Working experience in years
Languages	Number excluding native language
VisitAfr	Visited other countries of Africa= 1; Otherwise = 0
Visit Abr	Visited countries outside Africa= 1; Otherwise = 0
ForeignRes	Residence outside the country in years

Correlations are in Table 3. OLS regression was employed to examine the associations between the various CQ scores employed in the study were estimated in the following model:

$CQ = b_0 + b_1*Location + b_2*Gender + b_3*Age + b_4*Experience + b_5*Languages + b_6*VisitAfr + b_7* VisitAbr + b_8* ResidenceAbr + e$

To test how proxies for higher exposure to different cultures are associated with different components of CQ, five separate models were run: with Total CQ, Metacognitive CQ, Cognitive CQ, Motivational CQ and Behavioral CQ as dependent variables.

Results and discussion

The results of the regression are in Table 4. In all five models, gender independent variable is insignificant in the model. This is in accordance with previous research on young students (Engle & Crowne, 2014; Harrison, 2012) as also on mature management students (MacNab & Worthly, 2012). Gender did not turn out to be significant variable in any of the regreesions. It appears that “Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus” type of distinction does not seem to apply in the management education sector. Age is positive and significant in all five models. This could be because older academics have had more opportunities to broaden their cultural experiences Arguably, for the same reason, Experience is also positive and significant.

Table 3

Correlations between variables

	Metacogn-itive CQ	Cognitive CQ	Motivati-onal CQ	Behavi-oral CQ	Total CQ	Location	Gender	Age	Experi-ence	Langu-ages	Taught-Balkan	Taught-Abroad
Cognitive CQ	.623**											
Motivational CQ	.599**	.593**										
Behavioral CQ	.661**	.465**	.540**									
Total CQ	.867**	.828**	.820**	.794**								
Location	-0.061	-0.115	-0.054	-.135*	-0.112							
Gender	0.052	-0.008	-0.036	0.102	0.032	-0.012						
Age	0.078	0.078	.126*	0.061	0.103	-0.122	-0.064					
Experience	-0.039	-0.038	-0.021	-0.027	-0.038	-0.072	-.180**	.535**				
Languages	0.097	.199**	0.021	.126*	.139*	0.035	-0.006	-.240**	-.200**			
VisitAfr	0.112	.192**	.170**	0.106	.178**	-.129*	-.213**	.267**	.396**	-0.063		
VisitAbr	0.011	.180**	0.064	-0.012	0.08	-.281**	-.125*	.219**	.252**	-0.102	.245**	
ResidenceAbr	0.212	.239**	0.123	.148*	.222**	-0.005	-0.054	-0.037	-0.065	0.419	0.012	.226**

Table 5

Regression results

	Metacognitive CQ		Cognitive CQ		Motivational CQ		Behavioral CQ		Total CQ	
	β	*t*	*β*	*t*	*β*	*t*	*β*	*t*	*β*	*t*
Constant	4.990	20.006***	3.650	12.933***	5.028	20.453***	4.936	20.101***	4.651	22.2444***
Location	-.169	-.861	-.201	-.909	-.071	-.371	-.411	-2.135**	-.213	-1.299
Gender	.140	1.134	.081	.584	-.025	-.202	.229	1.888*	.106	1.030
Age	.267	1.764**	.315	1.826**	.351	2.334**	.204	1.355*	.284	2.221**
Experience	-.237	-1.575*	-.400	-2.348**	.354	-2.383***	-.145	.977	-.284	-2.249**
Languages	.027	.191	.382	2.434***	-.027	-.199	.158	1.154	.135	1.159
VisitAfr	.295	2.209**	.471	3.121***	.367	2.785***	.277	2.104**	.352	3.148***
VisitAbr	-.185	-1.139	.328	1.782**	-.029	-.179	-.222	-1.390*	-.027	-.199
ResidenceAbr	.434	3.144***	.307	1.966	.235	1.728**	.265	1.950**	.310	2.681***
Adjusted R^2	.087		.122		.044		.056		.095	

*p < 0.10,**p < 0.05,***p < 0.01

In learning another language, a parallel learning of its culture, along with its similarities and differences, normally tends to occur (Harrison, 2012). Yet, in this study Languages turned out to be an insignificant independent variable. This result could be due to historical and geographical reasons. Harrisons' research was in UK and foreign languages in the English context are obviously quite different from English. This is not the case in Africa where tribal languages are often similar. Data obtained on languages could be inaccurate. This confounds statistical analysis. Arguably for the similar reasons VisitAfr also turned out to be insignificant variables.

VisitAfr, unlike VisitAbr may have come out positive and significant because of higher cultural distance. People's pre-existing schemas are tested when they are exposed to a culture that is substantially dissimilar from their own (i.e., one with a high degree of cultural distance). Schemas are mental models of particular stimuli, such the institutional setting (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). People are challenged by prominent contrasts and counterpoints to their existing understanding of the institutional environment when they experience cultural distance, especially by their implicit assumptions about people, their habits, and their motivations. When these cultural differences are overt and significant, they are difficult for people's existing cognitive schemas to accommodate. As a result, people are forced to reconcile their pre-existing beliefs with the fresh perspectives provided by the culturally distant nation in order to form more sophisticated cognitive schemas (e.g., Black et al., 1992; Kharkhurin, 2011).

While internal consistency has been checked, external consistency remains a problem in much of empirical research. Similar studies in other countries would be required to understand the determinants of CQ of public enterprise executives in different contexts. Furthermore, longitudinal research into how people's CQ levels change over time would clarify the factors that contribute to its improvement. Future studies could incorporate several metrics of global experience to better understand its multifaceted effects. The finding from this study that foreign excursions are positively connected to CQ only when those visits happened in culturally more distant countries offers a foundation for future research.

Conclusion

Companies today compete in a setting that is substantially different from that of only a few years ago. Public sector enterprises have had to modify their usual processes as a result of rapid changes brought on by a globally networked environment, the Internet, big data analytics, technological advancements, and sustainability imperatives. These enterprises need to take measures to raise CQ

of their executives the determinants of which have been delineated in this research. Specifically, work visits to countries outside Africa and residence abroad both within and outside Africa can help.

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