

Cultural Intelligence: The new intelligence we need to function in a globalized world

Have you heard that the Japanese have 20 ways of saying “no”? Or that in many cultures, you don't use your left hand to pass something over, as it is seen as “unclean”? More importantly, would you know enough to put this into practice?

We had been au fait with the idea of IQ (Intellectual Quotient) for years when in 1995 Daniel Goleman came up with a new kind of intelligence—EQ, or Emotional Intelligence. If IQ measures cognitive abilities, EQ examines how we recognize, understand, and manage our own emotions as well as other people's.

In a world in which we move constantly across the globe and interact with people from very different cultures, we need yet another kind of intelligence. What works well in one culture does not necessarily translate well in another, and we can't define interculturality based on national stereotypes. It is easy to blunder in another cultural context, bringing with you all the customs and preconception of your own culture, however, that is unlikely to help you to form lasting relationships. Although there is no one best way of behaving in this global environment, there is a skill set you can develop to make success more likely—a kind of intelligence that helps us to function effectively in culturally diverse situations: CQ or Cultural intelligence. The good news is that CQ can be measured and developed. It takes aspects of IQ and EQ and tackles three areas—head, heart, and body.

Head Cognitive CQ is knowledge about context-specific facts, such as political, economic, social, environmental and legal systems in a particular culture. It helps you form more accurate expectations and be less likely to misinterpret cultural behavior. This first aspect of CQ is essential: do your homework and prepare. Add to this the basic dos and don'ts of the culture you are dealing with, to create a positive impression and avoid offending your partners or friends. If you want to create a long-lasting relationship, you need to quickly get informed about Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal (PESTLE) context of the country you are visiting. There is a reflexive or metacognitive aspect of this cognitive aspect. A leader with good metacognitive CQ constantly checks if her or his actions are appropriate for a specific cultural context.

Emotional Intelligence might also be called empathy or motivational CQ. First, you need to know yourself, be able to control your emotions, and believe in your self-efficacy.

Believe you can generate energy for dealing with unfamiliar situations or stress associated with problematic interactions, which sustains the ability to “become comfortable being uncomfortable.” Of course, experience in sometimes challenging global situations will grow your confidence. In practice, this means showing that you are interested in the language, the culture, the history of your counterpart. Show that you enjoy being there with them, that you are eager to learn.

Body Behavioural Intelligence is the ability to behave according to different cultural practices and use appropriate verbal and nonverbal behavior. The classical example is greeting: Do you shake hands, bow or something completely different? And handing over your business card with both hands.

But of course, there is much more to it. Verbal behavior will be very different according to culture: Who speaks? How loud or soft? How fast is the turn-taking in a conversation? Observe and adapt. Be aware of the differences in explicitness: in some cultures “yes” does not necessarily mean “yes.” You have to learn to pick up the other implicit codes of communication: silence, hesitations, uncomfortable behavior, or references to something else. Watch your body language: Wherever you are, don't point and don't cross your legs. Dress and sit properly: Don't put your hands in your pocket, keep both your feet on the ground, don't blow your nose in public, bring down the volume of your voice.

CQ involves knowledge, empathy, flexibility, and responsiveness to behaviour. Exposure to other languages and cultures is also a crucial part of developing CQ. Having elementary notions of a foreign language is not enough though. We know that bilinguals see the world through two different conceptual systems, which enhances their cognitive flexibility, divergent thinking, and creativity.

The good news is that CQ can be enhanced via training and experience. It should be a key element in any education program aimed at future global leaders, visitors or businesspeople. It is also something people can study and develop in their everyday life.

Literature

Earley, P.C., Murnieks, C. and Mosakowski, E. (2007), "Cultural Intelligence and the Global Mindset", Javidan, M., Steers, R.M. and Hitt, M.A. (Ed.) *The Global Mindset (Advances in International Management, Vol. 19)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 75-103.



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