



## Individual characteristics as predictors of cultural intelligence development: The relevance of self-efficacy<sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Cultural intelligence represents a promising development in the field of cross-cultural management. While foundational models and predictors of cultural intelligence have been proposed, there remains a need for more empirical research in cultural intelligence education and development. Theory relates cultural intelligence, and the development of this capacity, to a number of important considerations, including individual attributes and experiences. This research effort examines a multi-cultural group of over 370 managers and management students, testing theoretical relations between individual characteristics (i.e. general self-efficacy, international travel experience, management and work experience) with cultural intelligence development (meta-cognitive, motivation and behavior aspects). An experiential approach to cultural intelligence education is summarized. The findings suggest that general self-efficacy holds a key relation to predicting successful development of cultural intelligence capacities.

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### 1. Introduction

It is an often cited reality that more organizations are operating internationally due to expansion via the influences of globalization (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Black & Mendenhall, 1990). Managers are required to navigate culturally novel and culturally ambiguous situations more than ever. Cultural intelligence (also known as “CQ”) refers to an individual capacity, allowing one to more effectively interact with a variety of cultural settings; thus representing an advancement that can help to better situate individuals for a variety of inter-cultural interactions. Cultural intelligence provides a potentially effective approach in preparing for multi-cultural settings, culturally vague contexts or culturally dynamic places because it has the potential for assisting people in navigating culture specific realities (e.g. one identifiable target culture) as well as more culturally vague realities (e.g. multi-cultural teams without a specific cultural identity).

There are excellent treatments for the general topic of cultural intelligence (Brislin, MacNab, & Worthley, 2006; Earley & Ang, 2003), but there is a need for more work investigating how certain individual nuances might influence the potential development of, and propensity for, cultural intelligence. To investigate such potential links among a group of multi-cultural participants presents another layer of value to such an examination.

Experiential approaches to educational efforts are proposed as being effective (Dewey, 1938) and this is supported in Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory. Experiential encounters are hypothesized as being relevant for cultural intelligence development and there is empirical evidence supporting that position (Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009; MacNab &

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Worthley, 2010). As specified by the method summarized in this manuscript, experiential *education* holds potential advantages over experiential *learning* because of greater instructor involvement and reduced opportunity for mis-education (Itin, 1999; MacNab & Worthley, 2010).

Theoretically, experts in the field of cross-cultural training have suggested that individual attributes and traits are potentially important in cultural intelligence development (Brislin et al., 2006; Ng et al., 2009) and more generally to multi-cultural performance (Burke, Watkins, & Guzman, 2009). Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory suggests that individual life experience could have an influence on propensities toward cultural intelligence. Because cultural intelligence is a relatively new topic, more research is needed to investigate the relation of individual characteristics, such as self-efficacy, to the concept of cultural intelligence.

Self-efficacy has been proposed relevant as an antecedent to CQ development (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004) yet little research has been produced to empirically examine this. Self-efficacy has also been proposed as an important antecedent for development of cultural competence and in social learning contexts (Bandura, 1977a). More clearly understanding this relation to CQ development is one important motivation of this paper.

The remainder of this work: (1) summarizes the concept of cultural intelligence; (2) examines theory supportive of hypotheses examining certain individual characteristics, such as international travel and work experience as well as self-efficacy, to cultural intelligence development indicators; (3) overviews an experiential method to cultural intelligence development; and (4) discusses the findings and suggests the relevance of such findings to organizations as related to education, training and candidate selection.

## 2. Cultural intelligence

Cultural intelligence refers to individual capacities which enable one to interact effectively with others from different cultural backgrounds and in different cultural contexts (Brislin et al., 2006). Cultural intelligence represents the capability to be effective across and within cultures (Ng & Earley, 2006) and people can be taught these skills (MacNab & Worthley, 2010; Ng et al., 2009; Tan & Chua, 2003).

The concept of cultural intelligence can be linked to earlier foundational work in cross-cultural training. For example, Brislin (1993) identified three areas as critical in developmental cross-cultural effectiveness: thinking, emotions and behaviors. Earley and colleagues developed a three-part model of cultural intelligence with cognitive/meta-cognitive, motivation and behavior components (see Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004). An alternative model was developed (Thomas & Inkson, 2003) with knowledge, mindfulness and behavior as the three components. While these models all hold value, the Earley approach is used for this study due to both its establishment as a sound theoretical model and because there are related instruments for measuring the construct (Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, & Ng, 2004; MacNab, Worthley, & Brislin, 2007).

The cognitive component of the model refers to awareness, self-awareness and knowledge. This component also includes a meta-cognitive component which relates to thinking about thinking and related strategy (Earley & Peterson, 2004). Examples within this component of the model would include a basic knowledge that culture exists, one's own cultural background, stereotypes one holds about other cultures and how this influences one's perspective and thinking. It has been suggested that this aspect of cultural intelligence should be the first step in developmental training (Thomas & Inkson, 2003). For this reason, as clarified in the methods section, the intervention training for this study starts with this component.

The motivation component refers to perseverance and appropriate goal setting related to cultural interaction (Earley & Peterson, 2004, p. 17). An example within this component would be not giving up too soon in relation to the increased challenge and stress related to inter-cultural activity. Inter-cultural activity in general is comparatively more challenging and stressful than intra-cultural interaction. Because of different value systems and different "scripts" there are increased opportunities for misunderstanding and confusion. Inter-cultural activity is hard work and requires a level of motivation to continue engagement.

The behavior component refers to the ability to consciously adjust or adapt behaviors suitable to the cultural environment. This includes aptitude to determine where new behaviors are needed and how to execute these effectively. An example would be adjusting one's specific manner of communicating to more effectively interact with host nationals. In this component of cultural intelligence, a person might adapt the different scripts of the host culture in order to socially interact more effectively.

### 2.1. Cultural intelligence education

Cultural intelligence education describes efforts and interventions designed to improve the inter-cultural capabilities of individuals or groups, allowing for more effective interaction in a variety of cultural settings. These education efforts are designed to create a more culturally enabled person, ideally affecting all areas of cultural intelligence: cognitive/meta-cognitive, motivation and behavior.

Cultural intelligence education as a *process* is something that has been generally developed in other work (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004; MacNab & Worthley, 2010; MacNab et al., 2007; Thomas, 2006). Generally, the related training process initiates with basic cultural awareness/knowledge which would be found in the cognitive parameter of cultural intelligence and this would assist the individual to adapt appropriate behavioral adjustments (Thomas, 2006). This

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