

REDEFINING INTERACTIONS ACROSS CULTURES AND ORGANIZATIONS: MOVING FORWARD WITH CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

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ABSTRACT

A great deal of attention has focused on intercultural understanding in the wake of the terrorism experienced in the United States on September 11th, 2001. Among the core questions asked is why would people hate Americans enough to inflict such a toll on its citizens? A quest for intercultural understanding is sought frequently by people operating in multicultural environments such as that experienced in a transnational or multinational firm. The focus of this chapter is to introduce and explore the implications of cultural intelligence (CQ), a construct intended to improve understanding of intercultural interactions. Cultural intelligence refers to a person's capacity to adapt to new cultural settings based on multiple facets including cognitive, motivational and behavioral features. The implications for cultural intelligence for several key aspects of international organizations are discussed.

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Pharmacia Quotes:

I think Europeans are much more international. They are used to working across borders, in different languages. They are used to treating people in a different way.

While you can explain with brutal efficiency how high the costs are, you won't be able to find solutions in a collective-bargaining atmosphere if you don't understand the other side.

It is important to respect the local culture.

UpJohn, Inc. Quotes:

Americans have a can-do approach to things. I try to overcome problems as they arise. A Swede may be slower on the start-up. He sits down and thinks over all of the problems.

I was astonished at European vacation habits.

In retrospect, I might have been a bit aggressive.

Quotes from top executives during the merger of Pharmacia, AB and UpJohn Inc.
(BBC1 newsprogram, Fall, 1998)

One of the most significant challenges facing managers in an international context is to ensure that they fully understand the views and position of their international counterparts. Intercultural misunderstandings are frequent and often having significant impacts on organizations. In the case of Pharmacia, AB and UpJohn, Inc. these companies had a series of difficult attempts to merge with one another with questionable success. Of course, the success of international mergers does not hinge solely on cultural understanding. However, such understanding seems a logical necessary, but not sufficient, condition for effective international companies.

What is required for effective intercultural understanding? A simple answer may be that a person who has high empathy will be able to figure out and understand the actions of others in a non-local context. But empathy alone seems insufficient to explain a person's capability to understand others from a new culture. Constructs including social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920) and emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) as well as practical intelligence or successful intelligence (Sternberg, 1997; Sternberg, Conway, Ketron & Bernstein, 1981; Sternberg & Smith, 1985) might well explain differential success of intercultural encounters. However, as I argue in this chapter, these various forms of intelligence do not capture the complexity of understanding arising from intercultural encounters and travels. A single qualitative anecdote illustrates my point. A manager working for a large food

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