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Training Section

The relationship between cultural intelligence and performance with the mediating effect of culture shock: A case from Philippine laborers in Taiwan

Angela Shin-yih Chen^a, Yi-chun Lin^{b,*}, Airin Sawangpattanakul^c

^a Chang Gung University, 259, Wenhua 1st Road, Kwei-Shan, Taoyuan 333, Taiwan

^b National Taiwan Normal University, 2, Sec. 1, Ren-ai Rd., Linkou Township, Taipei County, Taiwan

^c National Chung Hsing University, Taichung, Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of the present study was to explore the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) and its effect on performance of foreign laborers. We also examined the mediating effect of culture shock on the relationship between CQ and performance. Data were collected from Philippine laborers working in Taiwan. A paper-based survey, with a return rate of 76.4%, was completed by 382 Philippine laborers working in Taiwan's manufacturing industries. The results showed that CQ was positively related to the performance of Philippine laborers and negatively related to culture shock. In addition, we found that culture shock partly mediated the relationship of CQ and performance. These findings suggested that CQ can serve as a predictor for cross-cultural effectiveness. Implications for practice and direction for future research are offered.

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1. Introduction

Today, rapid advances in technology and communication have created a global economy (Friedman, 2006). In this global marketplace, people have many opportunities to choose employment in different countries. As such, the socio-demographic factors such as race, religion and sex that already make for a multi-faceted workforce in a given organization can be exacerbated by the factor of nationality. Employees can find themselves working in a newly diverse cultural environment. This phenomenon has required many organizations and individuals to meet the challenges of cultural diversity (Crocker, 2002; Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006; Stiglitz, 2003).

In order to diminish the problems caused by cultural diversity in the workplace, employees must be open to interacting with colleagues who are from different cultures, and they must have the ability to build interconnections with people who are different from them. In other words, when employees understand cultural differences in the workplace, they are more apt to accept them. This kind of intelligence can be an index for the capability to effectively adapt to new cultural contexts. Earley and his colleagues introduced the construct of cultural intelligence (CQ) to explain differences in the effectiveness of individual interactions across cultures (Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003). Individuals with a higher CQ can more easily navigate and understand unfamiliar cultures and adjust their behaviors to perform effectively in culturally diverse situations (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Rosen, Digh, Phillips, & Rosen, 2000).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +886 2 7714 8656.

E-mail addresses: angelanchu2@gmail.com (A.S.-y. Chen), lin.hrd@ntnu.edu.tw, axc176@gmail.com (Y.-c. Lin), guycmu@hotmail.com (A. Sawangpattanakul).

However, not everyone has the intelligence to adjust effectively in a cross-cultural workplace. Extensive research has shown that 16–70% of expatriate assignments end in failure. Most expatriates suffer from problems of adjustment and culture shock (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, & Stroh, 1999; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Naumann, 1992; Rose, Kumar, & Subramaniam, 2008). These problems cause uncertain feelings, personal and professional stress, frustration and confusion, and result in differences in behavioral expectations (Black & Gregersen, 1991a, 1991b).

These problems occur not only among international expatriates, but also among foreign laborers. Increasingly, foreign laborers are being hired to work in the global marketplace. They move from country to country to fill the demand for labor. In most countries, the labor workforce is becoming increasingly heterogeneous. As with expatriates, these workers face intercultural problems in their daily life as well as on the job. Taiwan provides a good example. Taiwan is one of the countries that has opened its labor market in order to solve the problem of a labor shortage, particularly in its manufacturing and construction industry sectors since 1992 (CLA, 2002; Lan, 2003). In May 2010, there were a total of 364,789 foreign laborers in Taiwan. The majority of foreign laborers in Taiwan are from Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia (147,723 workers), Vietnam (78,875 workers), the Philippines (75,668 workers), and Thailand (62,512 workers)². Among those foreign laborers in Taiwan, Philippines laborers have a higher proportion of workers who are older and have college degrees, and most are employed in Taiwan's manufactory industry (Lan, 2003).

Foreign laborers in Taiwan suffer many on-the-job problems: missing work time with no excuses, performing their jobs at a much slower pace than normal, neglecting orders by managers, misconduct, and low morale. Those kinds of behaviors have strong impact on their performance. In a paper by Tsai and Yu (1998), foreign laborers perceived that such behaviors had an influence on their productivity and created conflicts with employers and fellow employees.

If foreign laborers gain an appreciation for cultures different from their own, then they could possibly solve these problems easily, decrease their culture shock and avoid the chances for conflict with employers and fellow employees when they work in a different country or culture. Hence, cultural shock is viewed as fundamental, and expatriates or foreign laborers must somehow overcome the social and psychological differences between his or her own cultural perceptions and those of the new environment in order to interact socially. Culture shock is regarded as a transitional experience and a mechanism to cross-culture effectiveness either in a work setting or a non-work environment in the host country.

1.1. Research problem

Employees' intelligence or ability to perform effectively and efficiently in different cultures and environments has been increasingly recognized as very important. This intelligence is defined as CQ, which is another complementary form of intelligence. CQ is composed of four dimensions: meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ (Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006; Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003). In the past, researchers primarily focused on CQ with respect to conceptual theory (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2006) and by further development of a construct of CQ. Recent empirical research has a diverse set of individual difference constructs which could be related to CQ (Ang et al., 2006). For example, the relationship between CQ and the Big Five personality traits was demonstrated by Ang et al. (2006). A later study found that motivational CQ was significantly related to cross-cultural adjustment (Templer, Tay, & Chandrasekar, 2006). The more updated study examined the effects of CQ on cultural adjustment, decision making, cultural adaptation, and task performance (Ang et al., 2007). However, as many previous researchers recommended that CQ should continue to be validated, they applied it in wider and broader contexts. It is critical to examine CQ as a multidimensional construct with differential relationships and specific intercultural effectiveness outcomes (Ang et al., 2007; Templer et al., 2006).

In addition, dozens of academicians and researchers have written about and studied many topics on cross-culture adjustment or adaptation (Black, 1990; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Harrison, 1994; Hisam, 1997; Mumford, 1998; Oberg, 1960; Winkelman, 1994) and measured the relationship between culture shock and adjustment as well as confirmed this significantly negative relationship (Anderson, 1994; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Guy & Patton, 1996; Khan & Khan, 2007; Oberg, 1960; Pires, Stanton, & Ostefeld, 2006; Selmer, 1999; Sims & Schraederm, 2004; Tsai, 1995; Ward & Searle, 1991; Winkelman, 1994). Yet, very little attention has been devoted to what is often cited as the primary obstacle to adjustment—the phenomenon referred to as “culture shock.” Most researchers since Oberg have observed that expatriates do not make successful adjustments unless they confront the potentially debilitating effects of culture shock. It is apparent that achieving a successful expatriate assignment depends on their adjustment to a new culture and requires a successful resolution of culture shock (Hisam, 1997; Mumford, 1998).

It seems instructive to take a closer look at this troublesome phenomenon of culture shock and its impact on cross-culture effectiveness. The present study used foreign laborers as a sample in order to study the relationship of CQ with other culture-related factors in Taiwan. The obtainment of CQ was expected to improve in a cross-cultural environment and there were different predictions for cross-cultural effectiveness.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between CQ and performance with culture shock as the mediating effect when foreign laborers work in a different culture and country. Based on the above statement, the research

² Statistics are retrieved from the website of Council Labor Affairs, Taiwan (2010). Counseling and Service Website for Foreign Workers Working in Taiwan (Blue Collar). Bureau of Employment and Vocational training, Council Labor Affairs, Taiwan. <http://www.evta.gov.tw/files/57/722048.pdf>.

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