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Understanding Cultural Intelligence Factors Among Business Students in Romania

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Abstract

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a relatively new concept, one that explains why certain individuals can adapt to different cultural contexts more efficiently than others. Using Earley & Ang's (2003) multidimensional concept as an analysis framework, this paper will study the intercultural intelligence among business students in Romania. We have chosen this research topic because we believe that the business students of today will become the global managers of tomorrow. Given that CQ is a multidimensional concept, this paper will analyze the answers for each of the four CQ dimensions, in order to identify which of the four capabilities is more or less developed among students. The final purpose is to understand the CQ components on which higher education should focus more. We wish to find educational solutions adapted to the actual needs of business graduates.

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1. Introduction

The world of business is becoming more and more globalized, reason for which taking part in international and cross-cultural business is a necessity for most contemporary large organizations, but also for small and medium sized enterprises (Alon & Higgins, 2005). Nowadays, globalization also represents a growth in international labor

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mobility (Templer et al., 2006).

Although a source of opportunities, globalization creates challenges for individuals and organizations, by increasing cultural diversity. In the current business environment, which is increasingly globalized, there is a growing need for global managers, who are capable of being efficient in foreign work assignments; more precisely people who possess specific knowledge, skills and abilities, necessary to manage and lead anywhere around the world. We could say that globalization provides a demand for specialists prepared to interacting across cultures.

Studying and understanding the cultural diversity, in the context of globalization, is a current matter and also a very complex one, because globalization intensifies multicultural interactions but, at the same time, generates tension and conflicts (see Ang et al., 2012, with regards to ideological clashes and cultural conflicts, p. 582). The cultural diversity may act as a challenge for expatriates and for global leaders (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Van Dyne & Ang, 2006). This is because the ability to interact effectively in multiple cultures is not a skill possessed by all (Crowne, 2008). Some individuals are more successful than others in a cross-cultural business situation.

To answer the question of why some individuals are more effective than others in culturally diverse situations, Earley & Ang (2003) developed the construct of cultural intelligence (CQ) defined as „*a person's capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings; that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context*” (p. 9). Peterson (2004) defined cultural intelligence as the aptitude to use skills and abilities appropriately in a cross-cultural environment.

The CQ concept is developed and detailed in subsequent studies (VanDyne & Ang, 2007; Ang et al. 2007; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Ang et al. 2012). CQ is seen as a capability that allows individuals to understand and act appropriately across a wide range of cultures. The authors have developed CQ as a multidimensional concept, „*targeted at situations involving cross-cultural interactions arising from differences in race, ethnicity and nationality*” (Ang et al. 2007, p 336). CQ thus comprises four distinct, but linked components (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioural). They believe that these components structure an individual's ability to learn about other cultures, the ability to learn about how to learn about culture, the desire to interact across cultures and the ability to modify behaviour to do so successfully.

Metacognitive CQ refers to the mental processes that individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. It is about the individual's level of conscious cultural awareness. It includes processes such as planning, monitoring and revising mental models of cultural norms for different countries or groups of people. The authors believe that people with high metacognitive CQ are able to question cultural assumptions, to adjust their mental models in intercultural situations. They are aware of others' cultural preferences before and during interactions.

Cognitive CQ refers to the knowledge of the norms, practices and conventions in different cultures, acquired from education and personal experiences. People with high cognitive CQ, know and understand the economic, legal and social contexts of different cultures. They also know the existing cultural models and hold information about the values, norms, traditions specific to cultures with which they interact.

Motivational CQ reflects the capability to direct attention and energy towards learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences; it is an essential component of CQ, being the source of interculturally adapted actions.

Behavioural CQ reflects the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures. Those with high behavioural CQ exhibit situationally appropriate behaviours based on their broad range of verbal and nonverbal capabilities.

In this paper, we will study the intercultural intelligence among business students in Romania. We have chosen this research topic because we think that current business students will find themselves more and more often in the face of expatriate assignments and there are great chances for them to become the future global leaders. As mentioned in the literature (Alon & Higgins, 2005), the future managers do not have to only master/know the global business functions such as finance, human resource management or marketing, they must also be „*extremely skilled in the interpersonal conduct of global business*” (p. 502).

Universities are also influenced by the globalization process, process which can be regarded as an opportunity or as a challenge. This is because globalization has, in the last few years, determined a growth in the flow of students who study abroad (both incoming and outgoing). This has led to an intercultural opening of higher education institutions, but has also changed the nature of the demand, by emphasizing the need for specialists who are prepared for a multicultural society.

We could say that universities with a high international opening can react in two different ways with regards to this globalized environment:

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