



## Brief report

## Cultural intelligence, personality, and cross-cultural adjustment: A study of expatriates in Japan



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## ABSTRACT

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has been theorized as the ability of individuals to adapt effectively in cross-cultural settings. This study sought to extend the literature by investigating whether CQ accounts for variance in cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates beyond what is accounted for by the five factor model of personality. Questionnaire responses from 154 expatriates in Japan were analyzed using hierarchical regression. The results indicate that motivational CQ can explain variance in expatriate general, interaction, and work adjustment over and above the five factor model of personality.

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## 1. Introduction

With the influence of globalization continuing to expand in today's business environment, many organizations increasingly rely on expatriates to conduct business abroad. While expatriate assignments are important to organizational performance and competitiveness, unsuccessful expatriates may be detrimental for the organization's operations in the host country (Gegersen & Black, 1990; Zeira & Banai, 1985). In order for an expatriate to successfully fulfill their foreign assignment, they often need to adjust their attitudes and behaviors to new cultural contexts (Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005). Research has shown, however, that all too often expatriates do not adjust well to the host country and are not successful in their positions (Caligiuri, 1997).

A growing body of research examines factors believed to impact expatriates' adjustment to new cultures. Extant literature on expatriate cross-cultural adjustment has revealed noteworthy findings relating to work, organizational and contextual factors (e.g., Black & Mendendall, 1990; Huang et al., 2005; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). Still, the current cross-cultural adjustment literature is limited and further research is desirable as to discern other predictors of expatriate cross-cultural adjustment and to increase predictive power.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) was first advanced by Earley and Ang (2003), defined as an individual's capability to adapt effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity. Thus, CQ can explain individual differences in adapting to new cultural settings. The authors conceptualized CQ as a multidimensional construct including four components: cognitive, meta-cognitive, motivational and behavioral. The construct of CQ has attracted increasing interest from scholars in areas including social, cross-cultural and organizational psychology (Konrad, 2006). Recent studies indicate that CQ is related to a number of important cross-cultural outcomes such as adjustment and task performance (e.g., Ang et al., 2007; Huff, 2013; Kim, Kirkman, & Chen, 2008; Templer, Tay, & Chandrasekar, 2006). Yet the research on CQ is still sparse and further exploration is needed on its antecedents, outcomes, as well as associations with other related constructs.

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While a significant body of research has examined the association between expatriate personality traits and cross-cultural adjustment (Black, 1990; Caligiuri, 2000; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985), little is known about the validity of CQ in predicting expatriate cross-cultural adjustment when personality traits are also considered. This paper seeks to fill this research gap by testing whether CQ explains variance in cross-cultural adjustment above and beyond personality traits.

This paper contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, it adds to the current CQ literature providing empirical evidence that is now limited. Second, the paper advances the research on cross-cultural adjustment, shedding light on how the four CQ dimensions influence the different facets of cross-cultural adjustment. Third, the research contributes to personality literature, offering greater insight into the current mixed findings about how personality traits impact cross-cultural adjustment facets. Last, by including both CQ and personality traits in the study, the paper enables us to compare the relative explanatory power of the two constructs regarding cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates.

Following colleagues in the field of cross-cultural adjustment literature, in this study we refer to cross-cultural adjustment as the degree to which expatriates are psychologically comfortable and familiar with different aspects of a foreign culture in the context of expatriate experiences (Black, 1988; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). An expatriate that adjusts well feels comfortable and experiences little stress associated with one's expatriate assignment in the host country. Prior research findings generally support the positive relationship between CQ and cross-cultural adjustment (Ang et al., 2007; Chen, Kirkman, Kim, & Farh, 2010; Huff, 2013; Kim et al., 2008; Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Lin, Chen, & Song, 2012; Templer et al., 2006; Ward, Fischer, Lam, & Hall, 2009; Ward, Wilson, & Fischer, 2011). However, the extant studies have important limitations. For example, a number of the studies have used an overall CQ score (Kim et al., 2008; Lee & Sukoco, 2010), an overall adjustment score (Lee & Sukoco, 2010), a reduced number of CQ factors (Templer et al., 2006), student samples (Ang et al., 2007; Lin et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2009, 2011), and/or a reduced number of adjustment factors (Ang et al., 2007). As far as we know, only two publications to date, one of three studies reported by Ang et al. (2007) and Huff (2013), have looked at all four CQ factors and all three of Black and Stephen's adjustment factors with a non-student sample. These studies also have mixed findings (e.g., only one of the two of them demonstrated that behavioral CQ predicted adjustment). Therefore, additional research is needed to better understand the connections between CQ and cross-cultural adjustment.

### 1.1. CQ and personality

A significant body of literature has examined the relationship between personality traits and expatriate outcomes. The meta-analysis conducted by Mol, Born, Willemsen, and Van Der Molen (2005) found that personality traits are significantly related to expatriate performance. Recent studies also found that personality traits impact cross-cultural adjustment dimensions (e.g., Peltokorpi, 2008; Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, and Ferzandi, 2006).

Research has found that personality and CQ are distinct although related constructs; each associated with its own unique set of individual differences (Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006). While personality characteristics are trait-like individual differences that describe broad and stable predispositions, CQ is state-like individual differences that describe malleable capabilities, skills and behaviors to deal effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity (Ang et al., 2006). However, very limited research has empirically investigated both constructs simultaneously regarding their impacts on cross-cultural adjustment, with mixed findings. While some studies found that CQ explained additional variance beyond personality traits in predicting cross-cultural adjustment (Ang et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2008), others reported non-significant findings (Ward et al., 2009). We expect that CQ can explain additional variance relating to cross-cultural adjustment beyond that explained by personality factors:

**H1.** CQ explains general, interaction, and work adjustment above and beyond the Big Five personality factors.

### 1.2. CQ and cross-cultural adjustment

The cognitive component of CQ relates to an individual's knowledge of specific norms, practices and conventions in a foreign country (Earley & Ang, 2003). It is the general knowledge and fundamental principles about the new culture, such as how much a person knows about the legal and economic systems, the rules of the foreign language, non-verbal communications as well as cultural values and religious beliefs.

Ang et al. (2007) found that cognitive CQ improves decision making in simulations of cross-cultural interactions although studies have not found a relationship between cognitive CQ and interaction adjustment (Ang et al., 2007; Huff, 2013; Kim et al., 2008; Ward et al., 2009, 2011). When an individual understands the rules or expectations of the culture, she can behave and communicate in ways that are accepted in the culture, which in turn improves the ability of the individual to interact appropriately with other people in the culture. Thus we expect that cognitive CQ will be positively associated with interaction adjustment:

**H2.** Cognitive CQ will be positively related to interaction adjustment.

Meta-cognitive CQ reflects the processes individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. According to Ng and Earley (2006), meta-cognitive CQ is an individual's cultural awareness during interactions with people in different cultural setting, involving cognitive strategies to acquire and develop coping strategies. Individuals with high meta-cognitive CQ are aware of cultural differences, and they effectively learn about the new culture and also how to act appropriately in

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