



# Does your intelligence help to survive in a foreign jungle? The effects of cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence on cross-cultural adjustment

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of cultural intelligence (CQ) and emotional intelligence (EI) on an individual's adjustment in a different cultural environment. A paper-based survey, with a return rate of 42.1%, was completed by 295 international college students who studied for a degree or were interested in learning Chinese as a second language in Taiwan. The data were analyzed using hierarchical regression to test the effect of CQ on cross-cultural adjustment, and the moderating effect of EI on the relationship between CQ and cross-cultural adjustment. The results showed that CQ had a positive effect on cross-cultural adjustment after controlling for gender, age, previous overseas experience, English ability, and host-country language ability. In addition, we found that EI positively moderated the relationship between CQ and cross-cultural adjustment. The present study demonstrates the importance and utility of CQ and EI in understanding the links relating to cross-cultural adjustment. The results of this study contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of cross-cultural research, and it provides practical implications for individuals seeking to improve their cross-cultural effectiveness.

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## 1. Introduction

With greater diversity in the workforce these days, economic, political and social cross-cultural interactions are frequent. These interactions occur in a variety of work-related situations, including short-term business trips to foreign countries and long-term overseas assignments, as well as non-work-related situations such as study abroad (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). People face different challenges in a cross-cultural environment while experiencing a transition from familiar to unfamiliar settings. They recognize that behavior patterns, emotional expression, attitudes, and cultural values that are acceptable in their familiar environment may not be acceptable in other settings, and that some things that are offensive in their own cultural settings are allowed in the new cultural environment (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Chen, Lin, and Sawangpattanakul, 2011; Montabaur, 2002). For example, foreign people in an unfamiliar environment often face difficulties with regard to language and communication, religion, politics, interaction with the host nationals, adjusting to a new culture, and so forth. Consequently, many intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts occur, due in part to a lack of cultural and emotional

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awareness of differences in behavioral expectations (Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Brislin, Worthley, & MacNab, 2006; Kumar, Rose, & Subramaniam, 2008; Triandis, 2006).

To lessen the uncertainty caused by cultural differences, people must be aware of cultural diversity and must develop the ability to build interconnections with people who are different from them. In other words, those who adapt successfully are more apt to accept differences. This kind of intelligence can be an index for the capability to effectively adapt to new cultural contexts. Earley and colleagues introduced the construct of cultural intelligence (CQ) to explain differences in the effectiveness of individual interactions across cultures (Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003). CQ refers to the ability to collect and process messages, to make decisions, and the relative approaches needed in order to adjust to a new environment. CQ consists of four components: Meta-cognitive CQ, Cognitive CQ, Motivational CQ, and Behavioral CQ (Earley & Ang, 2003). These four factors should be emphasized simultaneously, in order for individuals to more easily navigate and understand unfamiliar cultures and adjust their behaviors to perform effectively in culturally diverse situations (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). Kim, Kirkman, and Chen (2006) proposed that expatriates with a high CQ will more easily adjust to work and non-work environments than those with a low CQ.

However, not everyone has the intelligence to adjust effectively in a cross-cultural environment. Cross-cultural adjustment can be extremely challenging. Apart from changes in job and academic responsibilities, the cross-cultural adjustment of foreign professionals or students includes their general adjustment to a different climate, a new culture, a variety of language barriers, local traffic, shopping, entertainment, local food, health care service, and other general living conditions—adjustment to interacting with host nationals outside of work and at work to increase their comfort level when they are assigned jobs or tasks (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005).

Any adjustment requires a short- or long-term process for adaptation, and this can sometimes cause psychological stress (Aycan, 1997; Aycan & Berry, 1996; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Research also supports the concept that psychological stress resulting from poor adjustment has a strong effect on poor performance and job dissatisfaction (Cohen, 1980; Tung, 1988). On the other hand, good adjustment in a diverse context can lead to good mental health and satisfaction with life, good relationships with local people, compatibility with jobs, and a positive attitude toward new characteristics of jobs.

Appropriate emotional expression can reduce psychological stress and poor adaptation. Research also suggests that emotional stability and informational support can help reduce uncertainty in a cross-cultural setting. When people get along well with local people, it is easier to gain knowledge about culturally proper norms and behaviors (Kim et al., 2006). This ability to monitor one's emotional changes and accurately read the emotional reactions of others is called emotional intelligence (EI). EI is the capability most important for survival (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), and it influences all levels and aspects of people's lives. EI is not only associated with interpersonal and social relationships, but is also the key to success in the work domain (Caruso & Wolfe, 2001; Cherniss, 2002; Fitness, 2001; Matthews & Zeidner, 2000).

In our increasingly diverse cultural environment, more and more people work with diverse groups and encounter socio-cultural and psychological challenges. When foreigners misunderstand the literal meaning of the behavior of local people and have difficulty with communication, they become frustrated. Some overcome such frustration, while others may fail to handle the negative emotions. When there is difficulty managing such emotions, the adjustment to local culture suffers. The abilities to understand and manage the emotional reactions of yourself and those of others and to effectively adapt in culturally diverse settings, have been increasingly recognized as critical elements that influence adjustment (Engelberg & Sjöberg, 2004; Kumar et al., 2008; Yoo, Matsumoto, & LeRoux, 2006).

Acknowledging the need to increase an individual's CQ and EI can increase their adjustment to work, their interactions with host nationals, and their ability to deal with general living conditions in a cross-cultural context. Much previous research has examined individual differences and found that characteristics such as gender (Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003; Sam, 1998), age (Hechanova et al., 2003; Sam, 1998), duration in the host country (Beiser, 1988; Hechanova et al., 2003), previous foreign experience (Black, 1988; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), language ability (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999), and the Big Five personality (Ang et al., 2006; Aycan, 1997; Bardo & Bardo, 1980; Black, 1990; Church, 1982; Hawes & Kealey, 1981; Kanungo & Misra, 1992; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Searle & Ward, 1990) have a potential impact on cross-cultural effectiveness or intercultural adjustment.

However, research on individual capabilities or competencies to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings has been 'sparse and unsystematic,' which creates a critical gap in our understanding of why some people are more effective and adjust better in an overseas environment (Ang et al., 2007; Gabel, Dolan, & Cerdin, 2005). Multiple forms of intelligence, such as CQ and EI, have been recognized as important and needed for intercultural effectiveness (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Gabel et al., 2005; Kumar et al., 2008), but such relationships of the domain-specific intelligence, such as CQ and EI, have yet to be empirically proven (Kumar et al., 2008; Moon, 2010; Ward, Fischer, Lam, & Hall, 2009), and EI has not been adequately discussed in a cross-cultural context (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Lee & Sukoco, 2007). Recently, some authors have proposed that people with a high CQ in their original culture will not necessarily be successful in adapting to different cultural settings, but may have a better chance of adapting successfully to unfamiliar cultural settings (Moon, 2010); other authors have found that CQ is somewhat related to EI because individuals with a high CQ seem to be emotionally well-adjusted (Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006). It is reasonable to propose that EI might be a determinant of the need to compensate for a lack of CQ in order to better adjust to an overseas environment, and, in turn, that people with a lower CQ would need a greater EI to adjust their behaviors appropriately in a different culture. Regarding this, we utilized the concepts of CQ and EI as important personal capabilities to examine an individual's overseas adjustment. Therefore, the focus of the present

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