

CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND SUCCESS IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE, BEHAVIORAL, AND MOTIVATIONAL CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

Muhammad Nawfal Faris Bin Mohd Nazruddin ¹

Phang Yook Ngor ^{2*}

Hamidah Muhd Irpan ³

Noorazilah Ibrahim ⁴

¹ Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka, 78000 Alor Gajah, Melaka, Malaysia (Email: muhammadnawfalfaris@gmail.com)

² Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka, 78000 Alor Gajah, Melaka, Malaysia (Email: phang@uitm.edu.my)

³ Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka, 78000 Alor Gajah, Melaka, Malaysia (Email: hamdahirpan@uitm.edu.my)

⁴ Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics, Universiti Teknologi MARA Melaka, 78000 Alor Gajah, Melaka, Malaysia (Email: azilahibrahim@uitm.edu.my)

*Corresponding author: phang@uitm.edu.my

Article history

Received date : 4-9-2025

Revised date : 5-9-2025

Accepted date : 5-10-2025

Published date : 15-10-2025

To cite this document:

Mohd Nazruddin, M. N. F., Phang, Y. N., Muhd Irpan, H., & Ibrahim, N. (2025). Cultural intelligence and success in international business: The role of cognitive, behavioral, and motivational cultural intelligence. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 10 (62), 492 – 499.

Abstract: *Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is the ability to communicate, negotiate, and work effectively with people from culturally different backgrounds. CQ enables business to comprehend the values, beliefs, and practice of diverse cultures, which can promote worldwide expansion and innovation. Additionally, it can assist in establishing solid relationships with clients, partners, and staff from a variety of background. This paper explores the role of CQ in international business success, focusing on its three core dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and motivational CQ. By integrating existing literature and proposing a conceptual framework, this paper highlights how these dimensions individually and collectively contribute to enhancing cross-cultural competence, fostering effective communication, and driving business outcomes in global contexts.*

Keywords: *Cultural Intelligence, Cognitive, Behavioural, Motivational*

Introduction

One of the key factors for international business success is the ability to rapidly globalize the business while maximizing its capacity to operate effectively in diverse cultural contexts. This requires a high level of cultural intelligence (CQ), which enables individuals and organizations to understand, adapt to, and function successfully in different cultural environments. Understanding and adjusting a business to diverse cultural norms, religions, attitudes, and behaviours is important to CQ because it fosters connections between people and organisations engaged in cross-border business. Internationally expanding businesses requires individuals and organizations to encounter a range of cultural peculiarities that impact their communication, negotiation, and overall company operations. Beyond mere cultural awareness, CQ highlights the capacity to comprehend, manage, and capitalise on cultural diversity.

CQ is a crucial asset in international business as it influences all aspects of operations, ranging from supply chain management and employee collaboration to market entry and client relations. Companies that prioritize CQ can handle the challenges easily, build a deep connection with other customers, and modify their strategies to fulfil the demands of multicultural people worldwide. They will develop creative strategies focusing on flexibility and long-term success in the global market and economy. Organizations must be dynamic and foster cross-cultural adaptability and collaboration to succeed in a globally interconnected, competitive and diverse cultural market. This study establishes the knowledge and framework for the role of CQ as a driver of success in international business.

Problem Statement

While CQ is widely recognised as a key competency for cross-cultural interactions, the specific roles and interplay of its dimensions - cognitive, behavioural, and multinational CQ- in driving success international business remain underexplored.

Existing research often examines CQ as a unified construct, overlooking how each dimension uniquely contributes to outcomes such as effective communication, relationships-building, and strategic decision making in global contexts. This gap limits the ability of individuals and organisations to develop targeted strategies for enhancing cross-cultural competences. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how cognitive, behavioural, and motivational CQ individually and collectively influence success in international business.

Investigating the impact of cognitive, behavioural, and motivational CQs on international business success is both timely and significant. As globalisation continues to reshape the business landscape, understanding how these dimensions of CQ influence cross-cultural interactions can empower individuals and organisations to thrive in diverse environments. This study not only advances academic knowledge but also affects practical tools for enhancing cross-cultural competence, fostering innovation, and achieving sustainable success in global markets.

Research Objectives

Research Objective 1:

To determine the relationship between cognitive CQ and success in international business.

Research Objective 2:

To determine the relationship between behavioural CQ and success in international business.

Research Objective 3:

To determine the relationship between motivational CQ and success in international business.

Research Questions

Research Question 1:

Is there any significant relationship between cognitive CQ and success in international business?

Research Question 2:

Is there any significant relationship between behavioural CQ and success in international business?

Research Question 3:

Is there any significant relationship between motivational CQ and success in international business?

Literature Review

Overview of CQ and Success in International Business

CQ is one's capacity and ability to function effectively in a different culture and to work and relate with people of different cultures. It is a critical skill for entrepreneurs who are operating across different global markets. CQ affects the opportunity for identification, building network relationship, and enhancing performance in international business that can contribute to successful international entrepreneurship.

CQ has attracted widespread interest in the realm of international business due to its significance in how individuals negotiate the complexities of cross-cultural interactions. CQ comprises cognitive, motivational, and behavioural attributes that allow individuals to engage and interact with others from diverse cultural backgrounds and be adaptable in a variety of cultural situations (Earley & Ang, 2003). Xin-Liufang et al. (2025) investigated the effect of CQ on innovative work behaviour and demonstrated that mediation of knowledge sharing. CQ is becoming increasingly important in dealing with international business challenges (Semenov & Randrianasolo, 2024).

Success in an international business requires specialised marketing abilities, social dynamics, knowledge of different cultures, and effective negotiating. Important characteristics include the ability to create positive connections and performance outcomes, as shown by negotiators 'attention to relationship approach and knowledge focus (Numprasertchai & Swierczek, 2006). Additionally, understanding cultural differences is a very important skill in handling communication and negotiation strategies across diverse global markets (Brake et al., 2002). The relational exchange theory highlights the significance of making successful partnerships, arguing that mutual benefit and trust are crucial components of effective global cooperation. Moreover, to successfully negotiate the challenges of worldwide operations, international marketers need to have a certain set of skills, such as deeply understanding global marketing environments (Soares & Eduardo, 2016).

Cognitive CQ

The cognitive aspect of CQ refers to the knowledge people obtain about other cultures that aids in adapting to different cultures. The cognitive aspect itself is embedded in a larger structure that also include-behavioral, motivational, metacognitive factors that together facilitate effective navigation and communication in diverse security domain (Liao & Thomas, 2020). Furthermore, culture and the social structure influence our perceptions and interpretations of the world around us, as evidenced in the interaction between culture and intelligence (Cerulo, 2015).

In addition, the idea of cognitive culture underlines cognition's subjective and social nature, showing how cultural variables implicitly shape the construction and evaluation of knowledge (Bilalov, 2023). However, cognitive cultural studies are developed to allow understandings about these relationships with the perspectives of cognitive science and to further the understanding of the ways in which cognitive processes are affected by culture (Zunshine, 2010).

Relationship between Cognitive CQ and Success in International Business

In our globalized world, cognitive CQ (understanding cultural norms, practices and conventions) is becoming increasingly important for success in the international realm. This component of CQ helps people and businesses make sense of cultural differences so they can make better decisions and have stronger cross-cultural relationships.

New research highlights the relevance of cognitive CQ to international business in multiple ways. Sharma and Jain (2023) noted that an entrepreneur's level of CQ is a positive driver of both the market-entry and the market-expansion strategies in Noida Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Their research is a timely reminder of how companies that are culturally literate have succeeded in entering new markets and growing.

In addition, cognitive CQ appears to help business people communicate with and build relationships among diverse cultures in the business environment. Soni (2024) believes that CQ improves communication by helping businessmen understand language nuances and context-specific communication styles which is important for reducing miscommunication and trust building with international partners.

The practical implications of cognitive CQ are reflected in the business practices of international firms. Businesses such as McDonalds have adjusted their product mix and promotional strategies to match those of the local culture; thus, catering to local consumer preferences and desires as well as illustrating the importance of cultural knowledge in gaining success in international business settings (WebEditings, 2024).

Cognitive CQ is an essential capability for global executives. By promoting a sensitivity to cultural differences, companies optimize their global endeavors, develop strong international partnerships and profit from sustainable success in today's global marketplace.

Behavioural CQ

Operative CQ for behaviours (CQ-behaviours) is the capability of communicating with someone from another culture effectively with appropriate language and nonverbal expression. One element of this CQ feature is how we can customize behaviour to the cultural context – this includes using the appropriate language, tone, gestures and facial expressions (Ayoob et al., 2015). One framework in the CQ construct is behavioural CQ, which is defined as knowing what to do and being able to do it in intercultural interactions (Liao & Thomas, 2020).

This adaptability is a must for managers and professionals who need to cope with the diversity of cultural worlds (Semenov & Randrianasolo, 2024). High CQ behaviors focus on enhancing job performance and livelihood adaptation in multiple cultures, and thus, is a powerful predictor of cross-cultural effectiveness. (Ayoob et al., 2015). Since CQ influences the association between multicultural and innovation in organisations, the ability to engage in what is expected in divergent cultural contexts will not just express behavioural CQ but also facilitate

innovative work behaviour (Korzilius et al., 2017). This behavioral CQ is one of the frameworks that increase the support and effectiveness of CQ.

Relationship between Behavioural CQ and Success in International Business

Behavioral CQ refers to the ability to act in culturally appropriate ways within a specific situation by saying and doing the right things when interacting with people from other cultures. This also means changing verbal and non-verbal communicative styles to fit with cultural customs.

Clearborder (2023) reported that behavioral CQ is important for efficient cross-cultural communication and cooperation. Ability to adjust behaviours accordingly can help mitigate misunderstandings and build trust in international business relationships. Aligning appropriate negotiation styles with cultural expectations can have a positive impact on international business.

Additionally, behavioural CQ shapes the development of culturally agile organisations. Promoting behavioural CQ in organisations can improve their global networking and employee integration leading to success in international markets.

Motivational CQ

Motivational CQ refers to an individual's performance in a multicultural environment which is greatly influenced by his or her natural drive to interact with others from different cultural backgrounds and adjust to different cultural environment. It includes a desire to understand and negotiate cultural differences to improve mental wellness and general well-being at work (Yang, 2023). Since motivational CQ promotes successful communication and relationship-building with leaders, a person with a high motivational CQ have to better work engagement and experience less stress at work, especially among migrant workers (Yang, 2023). Motivational CQ helps people to handle cultural differences enhances their adaptability in culturally different settings (Bogilović & Škerlavaj, 2016).

Relationship between Motivational CQ and Success in International Business

Motivational (CQ) is an individual's readiness, willingness, and self - confidence to adapt to a new culture. This motivation is important in engaging successfully across cultures, especially in an international business setting.

Lin (2023) investigated the motivational aspect of CQ for Vietnamese migrant workers in Taiwan. The study showed that cross-cultural motivational CQ was positively associated with well-being and adaptability in cross-cultural work. That is those with high motivational CQ are more likely to overcome cultural barriers to successful adaptation to the new culture, and to future job success and satisfaction.

In the world of global business, motivational CQ gives professionals the stamina to endure cultural blunders and barriers. It develops perseverance and a positive attitude which are the keys to a successful relationship and goal accomplishment in cultures around the world!

Proposed Theoretical Framework

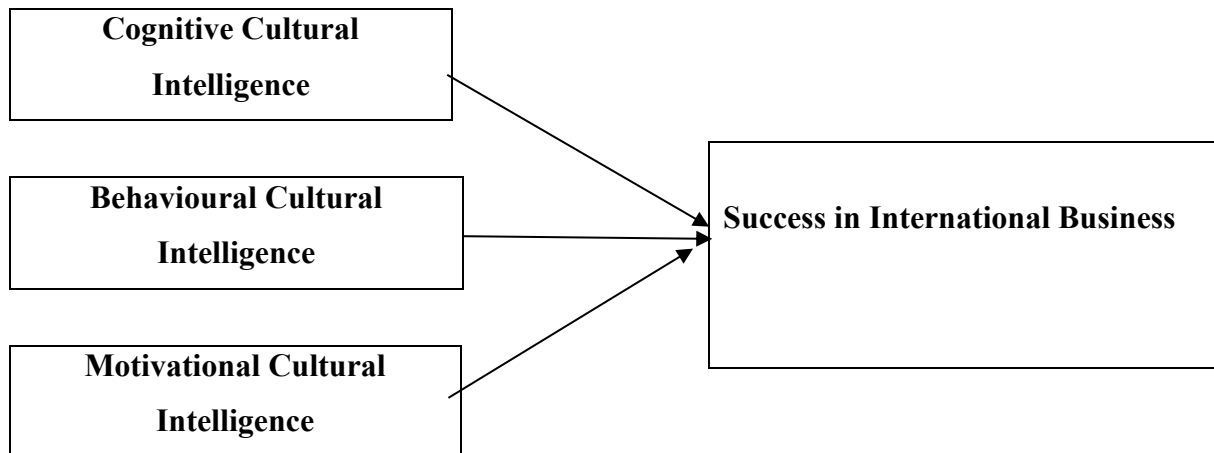


Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Framework of Successful of Cultural Intelligence as a Driver of Success in International Business

Thus, from the above-mentioned relationship, the hypothesis for this study can be derived as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between cognitive CQ and success in international business.

H2: There is a significant relationship between behavioural CQ and success in international business.

H3: There is a significant relationship between motivational CQ and success in international business.

Discussion

An indepth knowledge and understanding of cognitive, behavioural, and motivational CQs would help organisations understand cultural expectations, enable them to act in ways that build trust, and foster genuine relationships respectively across cultural boundaries for determining success in international business.

The three dimensions of CQ work together to enable individuals and organisations to understand, adapt to, and thrive in diverse cultural environments globally.

By developing and integrating all these three dimensions of CQ, business can enhance their cross-cultural communication, decision making, relationship-building, and adaptability in achieving sustainable success in global markets. Investing in CQ training and fostering a culturally aware organisational culture are essential steps for leveraging these three dimensions effectively.

Conclusion

Cultural intelligence is a crucial competency for success in international business enabling individuals and organizations to navigate the complexities of global market. By developing cognitive, behavioural, and motivational CQ, professionals and marketeers can enhance their cross-cultural effectiveness, build stronger relationships, and achieve sustainable business outcomes.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Phang Yook Ngor, for her valuable guidance and support throughout the research process. Her expertise and insights were invaluable in shaping our research and helping us to overcome challenges..

References

- Ayoob, M., Wani, N., Ahmad, M., Jan, M., & Dar, B. (2015). Cultural intelligence as a predictor of acculturative stress and psychological well-being among college students. *SciSpace*. <https://typeset.io/papers/cultural-intelligence-as-a-predictor-of-acculturative-stress-20jrwq1a63>
- Bilalov, M. (2023). Cognitive culture: subjective levels, operational mechanisms and creative products. *Humanities of the South of Russia*, 12(4), 82–93. <https://doi.org/10.18522/2227-8656.2023.4.4>
- Bogilović, S., & Škerlavaj, M. (2016). Metacognitive and motivational cultural intelligence: Superpowers for creativity and a culturally diverse environment. *Economic and Business Review*, 18(1), 55–76. <https://doi.org/10.15458/85451.18>
- Cerulo, K. A. (2015). Culture and cognition. *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0063>
- Clearborder. (2023). Maximising Cultural Intelligence in International Business. Retrieved from <https://clearborder.co.uk/resource/maximising-cultural-intelligence-in-international-business/>
- Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2003). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures*. Stanford University Press.
- Korzilius, H., Bückner, J., & Beerlage, S. (2017). Multiculturalism and innovative work behavior: The mediating role of cultural intelligence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 56, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2016.11.002>
- Liao, Y., & Thomas, D. C. (2020b). Conceptualizing cultural intelligence. In *Springer series in emerging cultural perspectives in work, organizational, and personnel studies* (pp. 17–30). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18171-0_2
- Lin, H. (2023). Motivational cultural intelligence and well-being in cross-cultural workplaces: A study of migrant workers in Taiwan. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 45(3), 743–761. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-01-2021-0026>
- Numprasertchai, H. P., & Swierczek, F. W. (2006). Dimensions of success in international business negotiations: A comparative study of Thai and international negotiators. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management*, 6(3), 259–275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595806068283>
- Semenov, A. V., & Randrianasolo, A. (2024). An extended conceptualization of cultural intelligence. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management*, 24(3), 563–586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705958241268289>
- Sharma, S., & Jain, S. (2023). Analyzing the Impact of Cultural Intelligence on Global Expansion and Market Entries in Noida's Special Economic Zone. *Journal of Namibian Studies*, 35(S1), 5578–5589.
- Soares, A. M., & Eduardo, F. S. (2016). Being successful in international markets: The role of international marketers' competencies. In M. H. Bilgin & H. Danis (Eds.), *Entrepreneurship, business and economics* (Vol. 1, pp. 515–524). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-27570-3_38

- Soni, S. (2024, June 6). The role of cultural intelligence in global business success. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/role-cultural-intelligence-global-business-success-saakshi-soni-dclhc>
- WebEditings. (2024). For Successful Global Business You Need Cultural Intelligence.
- Xin-Liufang, X.-L., Mohamad, A. A., & Lo, M.-C. (2025). The relationships between cultural intelligence and innovative work behaviour: The impact of knowledge sharing. *Journal of Management World*, 2025(1), 401–409. Academia Publishing Group
- Yang, C. (2023). Motivational cultural intelligence and well-being in cross-cultural workplaces: a study of migrant workers in Taiwan. *Employee Relations*, 45(3), 743–761. <https://doi.org/10.1108/er-01-2021-0026>
- Zunshine, L. (Ed.). (2010). *Introduction to cognitive cultural studies*. Johns Hopkins University Press