

4.6: Improving Intercultural Communication Skills

Learning Outcomes

1. Explain the importance of cultural intelligence.
2. Learn about metacognitive CQ.
3. Identify several different ways to create better intercultural interactions.

Become Culturally Intelligent

One of the latest buzz-words in the business world is “cultural intelligence,” which was initially introduced to the scholarly community in 2003 by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang.⁴⁰ In the past decade, a wealth of research has been conducted examining the importance of cultural intelligence during interpersonal interactions with people from other cultures. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is defined as an “individual’s capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity.”⁴¹

Four Factors of Cultural Intelligence

In their original study on the topic, Earley and Ang argued that cultural intelligence is based on four distinct factors: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Before continuing, take a minute and complete the Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire in Table 6.4.1

Table 6.4.1 Cultural Intelligence Questionnaire

Read the following questions and select the answer that corresponds with your perception. Do not be concerned if some of the items appear similar. Please use the scale below to rate the degree to which each statement applies to you 1- Strongly disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neutral 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree	
1.	When I am interacting with someone from a differing culture I know when I use my knowledge of that person's culture during our interaction
2.	When I interact with someone from a culture I know nothing about, I have no problem adjusting my perspective of that culture while we talk.
3.	During intercultural interactions I am well aware of the cultural knowledge I utilize.
4.	I always check my knowledge of someone from another culture to ensure that my understanding of their culture is accurate.
5.	During my intercultural interactions I try to be mindful of how my perceptions of someone's culture are either consistent with or differ from reality.
6.	I pride myself on knowing a lot about other people's cultures
7.	I understand the social, economic and political systems of other cultures
8.	I know about other culture's religious beliefs and values
9.	I understand how daily life is enacted in other cultures
10.	I know the importance of paintings, literature and other forms of art in other cultures
11.	I enjoy reaching out and engaging in an intercultural encounter.
12.	I would have no problem in socializing with people from a new culture.
13.	Although intercultural encounters often involve stress I don't mind the stress because meeting people from other cultures makes it worthwhile
14.	I would have no problems accustomising myself to the routines of another culture
15.	I enjoy being with people from other cultures and getting to know them

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16.	I know how to interact verbally with people from different cultures.
17.	I know how to interact non-verbally with people from different cultures.
18.	I can vary my rate of speech if an intercultural encounter requires it.
19.	I can easily alter my behaviours to suit the needs of an intercultural encounter.
20.	I can alter my facial expressions if an intercultural exchange requires it
SCORING	To compute your scores follow the instructions below
	Add items 1-5 Intercultural understanding
	Add items 6-10 Intercultural knowledge
	Add items 11-15 Intercultural motivation
	Add items 16-20 Intercultural behavior

Interpretation

Scores for each of the four factors (intercultural understanding, intercultural knowledge, intercultural motivation, and intercultural behavior) can be added together to get a composite score. Each of the four factors exists on a continuum from 5 (not culturally intelligent) to 25 (highly culturally intelligent). An average person would score between 12-18.

Based On:

Van Dyne, L., Ang, S., & Koh, C. (2008). Development and validation of the CQS: The Cultural Intelligence Scale. In S. Ang & L. Van Dyne (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural intelligence: Theory, measurement, and application* (pp. 16-38). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Cognitive CQ

First, cognitive CQ involves knowing about different cultures (intercultural knowledge). Many types of knowledge about a culture can be relevant during an intercultural interaction: rules and norms, economic and legal systems, cultural values and beliefs, the importance of art within a society, etc.... All of these different areas of knowledge involve facts that can help you understand people from different cultures. For example, in most of the United States, when you are talking to someone, eye contact is very important. You may have even been told by someone to “look at me when I’m talking to you” if you’ve ever gotten in trouble. However, this isn’t consistent across different cultures at all. Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures often view direct contact when talking to someone superior as a sign of disrespect. Knowing how eye contact functions across cultures can help you know more about how to interact with people from various cultures. Probably one of the best books you can read to know more about how to communicate in another culture is Terri Morrison and Wayne A. Conaway’s book *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More than 60 Countries*.⁴²

Motivational CQ

Second, we have motivational CQ, or the degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to different cultural environments. Motivation is the key to effective intercultural interactions. You can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you are not motivated to have successful intercultural interactions, you will not have them.

Metacognitive CQ

Third, metacognitive CQ involves being consciously aware of your intercultural interactions in a manner that helps you have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures (intercultural understanding). All of the knowledge about cultural differences in the world will not be beneficial if you cannot use that information to understand and adapt your behavior

during an interpersonal interaction with someone from a differing culture. As such, we must always be learning about cultures but also be ready to adjust our knowledge about people and their cultures through our interactions with them.

Behavioral CQ

Lastly, behavioral CQ is the next step following metacognitive CQ, which is behaving in a manner that is consistent with what you know about other cultures.⁴³ We should never expect others to adjust to us culturally. Instead, culturally intelligent people realize that it's best to adapt our behaviors (verbally and nonverbally) to bridge the gap between people culturally. When we go out of our way to be culturally intelligent, we will encourage others to do so as well. As you can see, becoming a truly culturally intelligent person involves a lot of work. As such, it's important to spend time and build your cultural intelligence if you are going to be an effective communicator in today's world.

Engaging Culturally Mindful Interactions

Admittedly, being culturally competent takes a lot of work and a lot of practice. Even if you're not completely culturally competent, you can engage with people from other cultures in a mindful way. As discussed in Chapter 1, Shauna Shapiro and Linda Carlson introduced us to the three-component model of mindfulness: attention, intention, and attitude.⁴⁴

First, when it comes to engaging with people from other cultures, we need to be fully in the moment and not think about previous interactions with people from a culture or possible future interactions with people from a culture. Instead, it's essential to focus on the person you are interacting with. You also need to be aware of your stereotypes and prejudices that you may have of people from a different culture. Don't try to find evidence to support or negate these stereotypes or prejudices. If you focus on evidencefinding, you're just trying to satisfy your thoughts and feelings and not mindfully engaging with this other person. Also, if you find that your mind is shifting, recognize the shift and allow yourself to re-center on your interaction with the other person.

Second, go into an intercultural interaction knowing your intention. If your goal is to learn more about that person's culture, that's a great intention. However, that may not be the only intention we have when interacting with someone from another culture. For example, you may be interacting with someone from another culture because you're trying to sell them a product you represent. If your main intention is sales, then be aware of your intention and don't try to deceive yourself into thinking it's something more altruistic.

Lastly, go into all intercultural interactions with the right attitude. Remember, the goal of being mindful is to be open, kind, and curious. Although we often discuss mindful in terms of how we can be open, kind, and curious with ourselves, it's also important to extend that same framework when we are interacting with people from other cultures. So much of mindful relationships is embodying the right attitude during our interactions with others. If you need a refresher on building the right attitude during your interactions, go back and look at Daniel Siegel's COAL Jon Kabat-Zinn's Seven Attitudes for Mindfulness discussed in Chapter 1.

Overall, the goal of mindful intercultural interactions is to be present in the moment in a nonjudgmental way. When you face judgments, recognize them, and ask yourself where they have come from. Interrogate those judgments. At the same time, don't judge yourself for having these ideas. If we have stereotypes about another a specific culture, it's important to recognize those stereotypes, call them out, understand where they came from in the first place, and examine them for factualness.

For example, imagine you're talking to someone from the Republic of Kiribati. Chances are, you've probably never heard of the Republic of Kiribati, but it's a real country in Oceania. But let's say all you know about the people from the Republic of Kiribati is that they like European-style football. During your interaction, you say, "So, what's your favorite football team?" In this moment, you've taken the one stereotype you had and used it to help engage in an interaction. However, if the person comes back and says, "I really don't care. Sports just aren't my thing." How do you respond? First, recognize that you attempted to use a stereotype that you had and call it out for what it was. That doesn't make you a bad person, but we must learn from these encounters and broaden our world views. Second, call out the stereotype in your mind. Before that moment, you may not have even realized that you had a stereotype of people from the Republic of Kiribati. Labeling our stereotypes of other people is important because it helps us recognize them faster, the more we engage in this type of mindful behavior. Third, figure out where that stereotype came from. Maybe you had been in New Zealand and saw a match on the television and saw the Kiribati national football team. In that one moment, you learned a tiny bit about an entire country and pocketed it away for future use. Sometimes it's easy to figure out where our stereotypes evolved from, but sometimes these stereotypes are so ingrained in us through our own culture that it's hard to really figure out their origin. Lastly, it's time to realize that your stereotype may not be that factual. At the same time, you may have found the one resident of the Republic of Kiribati who doesn't like football. We can often make these determinations by talking to the other person.

At the same time, it's important also to be mindfully open to the other person's stereotypes of people within your own culture. For example, someone from the Republic of Kiribati may have a stereotype that Americans know nothing about football (other than American football). If you're a fan of what we in the U.S. call soccer, then you correct that stereotype or at least provide that person a more nuanced understanding of your own culture. Sure, American football still is the king of sports in the U.S., but media trends for watching football (soccer) are growing, and more and more Americans are becoming fans.

Key Takeaways

- Cultural intelligence involves the degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations. Cultural intelligence consists of four distinct parts: knowledge, motivation, understanding, and behavior.
- Having strong intercultural relationships can be very rewarding. When thinking about your own intercultural relationships, some ways to have more rewarding intercultural relationships can include: understanding your own culture better, being interested in other people and their cultures, respecting other people's cultures, becoming culturally intelligent, tolerating ambiguity during interactions, being aware of and overcoming your own ethnocentrism, and being a good example of your own culture.

Exercises

- The Cultural Intelligence Center has created a widely used 20-item measure for cultural intelligence. Please take a second and complete their measure: [http:// www.culturalq.com/docs/The%20CQS.pdf](http://www.culturalq.com/docs/The%20CQS.pdf) What were your CQ strengths and CQ weaknesses? Where would you most want to improve your CQ?
- Visit the National Center for Cultural Competence at [http://nccc.georgetown.edu/ about.html](http://nccc.georgetown.edu/about.html). Read some of the material on their website. Look for their ideas and compare to what you've learned in this section.
- James L. Mason created a cultural competence tool for service agencies ([http:// files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED399684.pdf](http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED399684.pdf)). Take a look at their tool, which is freely available online. What do you think of their tools for evaluating cultural competence? Do you think cultural competence and cultural intelligence are similar, different, or identical? Why?

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