



Your CQ

Why it might be the
most important number
you don't know!

David Livermore

Everything has gone global: Communication. Work. Politics. Relationships. Faith.

We get it. In fact, by this point, the statement almost sounds a bit trite. By now, any organization knows that the word “global” better find its way into its messaging and strategy.

But how do we move beyond mantras about cultural sensitivity and global awareness to successfully adapting to various cultures while simultaneously remaining true to ourselves? Both sides of the equation are essential—being true to ourselves *and* adapting to different cultures, and being true to our organizational identity and brand while also responding to an onslaught of culturally diverse markets.

The options presented often seem incomplete:

- “*Tolerate Differences.*” Do any of us simply want to be “tolerated?”
- “*Go Native.*” Um... maybe not. At best, it looks foolish. At worst, it’s insulting.
- “*Be intolerant.*” That’s not going to work if we’re going to get anything done in today’s world.
- “*It’s all about respect.*” Not bad! Respect is at the core of how we should relate.
But how does respect by itself lead to solutions?

- “*Figure out their culture.*” That can be scary. Are businesses, religious groups, and individuals simply learning about different cultures in order to exploit them?

Now, based upon academic research across dozens of countries, a better approach has emerged. It’s known as cultural intelligence, or CQ, and it’s proven to enhance the way we work and relate across cultures.

- It’s about respect *and* results.
- It’s about being yourself *and* adapting to other cultures.

Both sides of the equation are essential—
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to different cultures ...

Promising Discoveries

Cultural intelligence was conceived at the turn of the century, when businesses, governments, universities, and the world at large were experiencing unprecedented global interconnectedness and, as a result, cultural conflict. It's a foregone conclusion throughout the globalized world that cultural sensitivity and global awareness are important ideals that should show up in school curriculum, corporate values, and community objectives. But cultural sensitivity is one of those lofty ideals that can easily become little more than mission statement lingo if it isn't carefully defined and measured. This is where the research on cultural intelligence comes in.

The question that drives the research on cultural intelligence is this: Why do some individuals and organizations easily and effectively adapt their views and behaviors cross-culturally and others don't? What factors explain the difference?

The research found that individuals who are effective in culturally diverse situations are people who are comfortable in their own skin, which in turn allows them to learn and listen to the perspective of others. This finding reinforces what we might expect to be true but it shifts the emphasis away from traditional approaches to culture and diversity that have focused upon learning cultural stereotypes and adapting to them: e.g. *Here's how Chinese behave versus Canadians*; or *This is how African American men vote versus Hispanic American women*. And it moves toward an overall capability that can be developed for the myriad of cultures experienced by any of us. In today's globalized world, can we really label all Chinese or all African American men as viewing the world one way? And is the best approach to be like whomever you're with? These approaches and stereotypes are way too elementary for today's world.

In contrast, the research on cultural intelligence, which included studies by academics from more than 30 countries around the world, discovered that cross-cultural effectiveness is largely a personal capability rooted in one's internal motivation, consciousness, and adaptability. This has

led to a whole new way of approaching the age-old topics of cultural sensitivity, racism, and cross-border effectiveness because it's based upon internal issues and individual strengths rather than upon artificial changes in behavior or politically correct language. It draws from the same research as emotional and social intelligence.

Cultural intelligence is described as the capability to be effective across various cultural contexts—including national, ethnic, organizational, generational, ideological, and much more.¹ It's less about becoming an expert about every culture and more about developing an overall capability that allows you to become effective and respectful in any cultural situation.

Just as emotional intelligence helps you interact effectively with people based upon the cues they send about their emotional state, cultural intelligence allows you to have that kind of insight when you aren't a cultural insider. A great deal of what it takes to detect and respond in light of the emotions of another person presumes I know how to interpret their non-verbals and the subtext beneath their words. That's difficult if not impossible when dealing with someone from an unfamiliar culture. Cultural intelligence picks up where skills like emotional intelligence and social intelligence leave off and allows us to have the same kind of practical sensibility when interacting with individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds than we do.

The research reveals four capabilities that consistently emerge among individuals who are culturally intelligent:²

1. CQ Drive: They possess a high level of interest, drive and motivation to adapt cross-culturally.
2. CQ Knowledge: They have a strong understanding about how cultures are similar and different.
3. CQ Strategy: They are aware and able to plan in light of their cultural understanding.
4. CQ Action: They know when to adapt and when not to adapt when relating and working cross-culturally.

A community of international scholars have developed an academically validated scale for measuring these four CQ capabilities. The CQ scale is the basis of a variety of CQ assessments that are now being used widely around the world. The CQ assessment consistently predicts one's level of effectiveness working in various cultural situations—either at home or overseas. Growing numbers of governments, businesses, and charitable organizations are using CQ assessments to improve their effectiveness in today's globalized playing field.

A few of the most important discoveries from the research on cultural intelligence are:

- Your CQ predicts how you'll adjust to cultural differences whatever the context, including generational cultures, ethnic, organizational, ideological, and many others.
- Your CQ is a much stronger indicator of your cross-cultural effectiveness than your IQ, nationality, education, or EQ (emotional intelligence).
- With high CQ, you're more likely to:
 1. Adapt to unpredictable situations.
 2. Remain true to yourself while also adapting cross-culturally.
 3. Be the most sought-after job candidate for management positions.
 4. Network better.
 5. Negotiate more effectively.
 6. Generate more income for yourself and your organizations.
 7. Enjoy better personal well-being in culturally complex situations.
 8. Be the best “interpreter” and “translator” for groups that might not otherwise understand or relate well together.³

Improving CQ

Your CQ can improve. It's something anyone can develop and learn, assuming they have the interest in doing so. A few basic ways to get started include the following:

Personal Development

Hands On-Experiences: There's no substitute for "on-the-job training" when it comes to improving your CQ. The ideal scenario is when you have a chance to travel internationally and get immersed in a local culture. Whether you're traveling for work, pleasure, or as a charitable volunteer, be sure to wander from the touristy spots. Even if you're staying at the Shangri-La in downtown Bangkok, you can jump on a local bus and suddenly be immersed with locals. This gives you a whole different insight into Thai culture than what you'll get from the hotel lobby or Starbucks.

There's an abundance of opportunities for hands-on experiences closer to home too. Chances are, there are growing numbers of people from different cultures living nearby. The U.S. census data just reported that the U.S. now has 50 million Hispanics—more than the entire population of Spain. Although many Hispanic-Americans live in coastal cities or closer to the border, even my little Midwest city in Michigan has grown from 3% Hispanic fifteen years ago to 17% Hispanic today! And if you're in a community where there's still relatively little ethnic diversity, seek out interactions with people who come from a different subculture religiously, politically, or generationally.

Or gain some hands-on-experience by pulling together a cross-functional team with people from marketing, engineering, and IT. Working together with people from these kinds of diverse "subcultures" can also play a role in increasing your CQ. Individuals who are part of culturally diverse groups are more likely to have high CQ than those who remain isolated with individuals like themselves.

It sounds obvious. But it's amazing how often work groups and social gatherings miss out on the rich resource available to them through hands-on experiences with diverse colleagues and friends.

Four Steps to Increasing CQ: The four capabilities that make up cultural intelligence can also be thought of as four steps to improving CQ. The research finds that cultural intelligence is best enhanced by first getting people motivated to engage cross-culturally (Drive), which then gives them greater interest in learning about cultural differences (Knowledge), which in turn helps them plan (Strategy) and behave (Action) accordingly.

The four-step process can even be used on the spur of the moment. Imagine you have a client from Germany arriving in 15 minutes. One way to quickly walk through the four-step process of increasing CQ is to ask:

1. CQ Drive: What's my motive and objective for what I want to accomplish with this client?
2. CQ Knowledge: What should I bear in mind about German culture to make this an effective meeting?
3. CQ Strategy: What's my plan for pulling this off?
4. CQ Action: How should I behave?

Cultural intelligence picks up where skills like emotional intelligence and social intelligence leave off ...

Assessment and Education

CQ Assessment: It's hard to quantify something as subjective as cross-cultural effectiveness. But given the validity behind the Cultural Intelligence Scale, the corresponding CQ assessments can help you identify your greatest CQ strengths and opportunities for improvement. In addition, you'll be able to compare yourself with more than 20,000 other individuals who have been assessed in CQ around the world.

Both self-assessments and multi-rater (360°) assessments are available. The multi-rater assessments offer you a whole different level of insight because not only do you reflect upon your own view of your CQ capabilities, but you gain the insights of how others who complete an observer assessment for you perceive your CQ capabilities.

Personal Development Plan: Once you have a good idea of where your greatest CQ strengths and weaknesses lie, you can put together a development plan for improving your CQ. The research on CQ has revealed several proven strategies for how to improve CQ in the four capabilities (Drive, Knowledge, Strategy, and Action). Many of these strategies may not strike you as rocket-science (e.g. name your biases, study a new language, manage your expectations, etc.) but they're proven to increase your effectiveness in culturally diverse situations. We often overlook some of the obvious ways to tap into things we already do to also improve the ways we interact and work cross-culturally.

Identify something you can do in the next week to help you improve in one of the four CQ capabilities (Drive, Knowledge, Strategy, Action). How about the next month? Six months? Year? Write down your plan, share it with someone, and have them offer you feedback.

Take A Class: Learning about culture through books and classes is NOT a sure way to improve CQ. In fact, someone who only learns about culture academically may actually have lower CQ than someone who hasn't taken any formal courses on culture and diversity. Cerebral understanding about culture, without the corresponding motivation and strategy can actually be detrimental to your overall CQ. You might think you're culturally intelligent and actually have little common sense for how to apply the cultural knowledge you've learned academically.

But when combined with the other priorities of CQ, studying about culture and global events through a class—either a formal university course or a workshop offered by your organization—can improve your CQ. This benefit can be tapped even from a class that doesn't directly relate to culture and diversity. Simply exercising the brain to think critically and strategically can play a role in how you improve your overall CQ. When you devote focused attention to studying the role of culture in the world and interact with others about it, it's another powerful way to enhance your cultural intelligence.

Respect and sensitivity are non-negotiable values, but we have to go beyond those ideals to actually find ways to successfully adapt to various cultural situations while still remaining true to themselves.

Lead with CQ

Hiring and Promotion: When recruiting volunteers or staff, look for individuals who demonstrate cultural intelligence. The typical approach to improving inclusion and diversity effectiveness has been hiring more people from minority populations. That's an essential component but it's not enough. Becoming a culturally intelligent organization also requires hiring individuals from the dominant culture (e.g. "white males") who have high CQ. Make CQ a priority when considering whom to put in leadership positions. And utilize the suggestions above for how to help your team personally assess and develop CQ. When these priorities are supported by your organization as a whole, they're much more likely to have staying power with your team.


Measure it: We measure what we value. To what degree does your organization as a whole reflect and prioritize CQ? Is this capability something that gets included in performance reviews? Is cultural intelligence perceived as primarily a do-good initiative by the organization or is it viewed as crucial to effective performance? The use of CQ assessments can be a valuable part of this measurement but so also are the use of focus-groups, employee and customer-satisfaction surveys, and regular interactions together as a team.

Connect CQ to the Overall Mission and Vision: If CQ is solely relegated as a "diversity issue" or an "international sales strategy" it's unlikely that it will really impact the organization as whole. But when it becomes integrated with the overall strategic plan and direction of the organization, there's much greater likelihood that the organization and its personnel will engage with a greater degree of intercultural effectiveness. Make it a part of your regular talking points, include it in the ways you market yourself to prospective employees, customers, and partners, and keep re-visiting the issue among leadership.

A Better Way

Despite millions of dollars spent on cultural sensitivity training and diversity programs, little has improved in the way many individuals and companies are actually behaving when it comes to working across borders—whether with the person in the cubicle next door or a client 12 time zones away.

Respect and sensitivity are non-negotiable values, but we have to go beyond those ideals to actually find ways to successfully adapt to various cultural situations while still remaining true to themselves. The cultural intelligence research and model is uniquely suited to address this need.

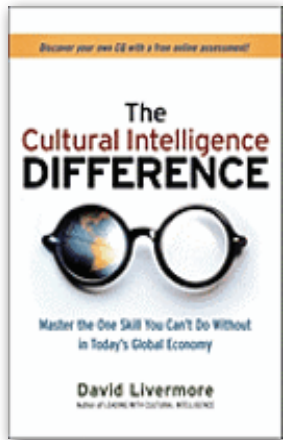
Begin by finding out what your CQ is, or more importantly—which CQ capabilities are strongest and weakest for you. Then gain the competitive edge that comes from improving your CQ while simultaneously treating people with respect and dignity... and in turn, make the world a better place for all of us. 

FOOTNOTES

¹ Soon Ang and Linn Van Dyne, “Conceptualization of Cultural Intelligence” in *Handbook of Cultural Intelligence: Theory, Measurement, and Applications* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 10.

² R. J. Sternberg, “A framework for understanding conceptions of intelligence,” in R. J. Sternberg and D. K. Detterman, eds., *What Is Intelligence?* (Norwood, N. J.: Ablex Publishing, 1986), 3–18.

³ S. Ang, L Van Dyne, C. K. S. Koh, K. Y. Ng, K. J. Templer, C. Tay, and N. A. Chandrasekar, “Cultural Intelligence: Its Measurement and Effects on Cultural Judgment and Decision Making, Cultural Adaptation, and Task Performance, Management and Organization Review (2007) 3: 335–371.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Livermore, PhD is the author of *The Cultural Intelligence Difference* (AMACOM, 2011) as well as several other award winning books on global leadership and cultural intelligence. He's president and partner at the Cultural Intelligence Center in East Lansing, Michigan and a visiting scholar at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. As a frequent adviser and speaker to government agencies, Fortune 500s, and charitable organizations, David has worked in more than 100 countries across the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe. Visit CulturalQ.com for more information on the CQ assessments available. Or, when purchasing a physical copy of *The Cultural Intelligence Difference*, you'll receive a unique code that provides you with access to the online CQ Self-Assessment.

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