

Chapter 15

Cultural Quotient: Evolving Culturally Intelligent Business Scholar–Practitioners

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ABSTRACT

Analytical competency is an essential skill when it comes to the present-day business scenario of the world. However, these days we see a shift in the business needs when it comes to working in a globalized environment. Not only is the intelligence quotient (IQ) looked at but organizations these days are in pursuit of individuals who have another side to their profile – the culturally intelligent side (assessed using the cultural quotient). The need of such a skill can be attributed to the fact that organizations are now churning out their human side of addressing the employees when it comes to ensuring that they blend in the organization with ease. Acquiring a workforce which possesses high cultural intelligence can be a tough task; however, training employees to become culturally competent can be a doable task. Like any other personality trait which can be imbibed over time through constant analysis and observation, cultural competency is one such area which may be cultivated through various methodologies and practices.

INTRODUCTION

The world is shrinking and leaders from different cultures are discovering the need of working together. Cultures arise out of geography, faith, gender, generation, organization and sector. In a global world, where cross-border issues exist between cultures, we need leaders who can transcend those boundaries and cultures; people who can communicate effectively and build diverse networks necessary to solve

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messy problems; leaders who don't just shy away from difference but gravitate towards leaders who don't perceive heterogeneity as threatening but as creative, exciting, inspiring and enriching. Such leaders are said to possess Cultural Quotient. Be it any place in the world, people are being flung together and are struggling to adapt and get on with each other. Old and new divides are being crossed. Populations are becoming more diverse. Communication technology has redefined global business which is no longer just the remit of a few large organizations, but is increasingly the ambition of small businesses and individuals. It is also happening within several sectors where the boundaries are blurring between the public, private and NGO sectors and leaders are struggling to understand one another.

In today's global economy, human resource professionals, managers and employees work with people from plethora of cultural backgrounds on a day to day basis. Who should adapt to whom, and how can organizations make the most of the burgeoning diversity across the workforce? Many employees encounter awkward and confusing situations on a regular basis. For example: You're talking to a person from a different culture, and he doesn't look you in the eye. Is it a cultural difference or a personal quirk? How do you know, and how do you deal with it? You're ready to sign a contract after months of intense negotiations with a new international client. At the eleventh hour, the client puts everything on hold and says she needs to get back to you in two weeks. How do you reply to that?

Success in these situations requires a unique set of skills referred to as cultural competence. Organizations and managers sometimes dismiss cultural competence as a set of elusive, soft skills that cannot be measured or taught. But that is not the case. These skills can be developed, and a number of intercultural models and inventories exist that can provide aid. This chapter is focused primarily on cultural intelligence (CQ), an innovative, research-based approach for working effectively across national, ethnic and organizational cultures (Ang et al., 2007). The good news is, becoming more culturally intelligent is plausible.

In a world where crossing boundaries is routine, CQ becomes a vitally important aptitude and skill; it is not confined to international bankers and borrowers. Companies, too, have cultures, often very distinctive; anyone who joins a new company spends the first few weeks deciphering its cultural code. Within any large company there are sparring subcultures as well: The sales force can't talk to the engineers, and the PR people lose patience with the lawyers. Departments, divisions, professions, geographical regions—each have a constellation of manners, meanings, histories, and values that will confuse the gate crasher and cause him or her to stumble. Unless, he/she is possess a high CQ. Cultural intelligence is related to emotional intelligence, but it picks up where emotional intelligence leaves off (Crowne, 2007). A person with high emotional intelligence is able to make out what makes us human and at the same time what makes each of us different from one another. A person with high cultural intelligence can somehow tease out of a person's or group's behaviour, those features, that would be true of all people and all groups, those peculiar to this person or this group, and those that are neither universal nor idiosyncratic.

An American expatriate manager we knew had his cultural intelligence tested while serving on a design team that included two German engineers. As other team members floated across their ideas, the engineers condemned them repeatedly as stunted or immature or worse. The manager concluded that Germans in general are rude and aggressive. A bit of cultural intelligence would have helped the American realize he was mistakenly equating the merit of an idea with the merit of the person presenting it and that the Germans were able to make a sharp distinction between the two. A manager with even subtler powers of discernment might have tried to determine how much of the two Germans' behavior was arguably German and how much was explained by the fact that they were engineers. An emigrant

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