Enhancing International Business Networks through Motivational Cultural Intelligence

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Abstract

The objectives of this article are 1) to investigate whether motivational cultural intelligence (CQ) can directly impact the other three individual CQ facets—namely meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ, 2) to test whether these CQ dimensions affect the international business networks of Chinese top managers operating business in foreign countries, and 3) to explore how motivational CQ, through its influence on the other three individual CQ facets, facilitates cross-cultural business networks. This study takes quantitative research methods, using self-determination theory as the theoretical framework. The data was collected from 396 Chinese top managers who are managing businesses in foreign countries. Data analysis is performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The research results are as follows:

1. Motivational CQ enhances meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ.

2. Meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ positively influence the international business networks of Chinese managers in foreign countries.

3. Motivational CQ indirectly strengthens managerial business networks through its effect on the other three individual CQ facets.

Knowledge derived from this study contributes to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the construct of cultural intelligence. It offers practical insights for educators, trainers, managers to develop training programs for enhancing cross-cultural competencies.

Introduction

In the global era, businesses are increasingly interconnected, and the popularity of international business and firms' internationalization is on a steady rise. Internationalization, the process by which firms expand their operations beyond their home markets, offers not only access to broader markets but also opportunities for resource acquisition, risk diversification, and strategic positioning (Verbeke & Kano, 2016). It has become a crucial strategy for companies aiming to pursue global growth opportunities and mitigate local market saturation, not only for big companies, but also for small and medium–sized enterprises (SMEs) (Fakhreldin, 2021).

However, internationalization inevitably poses many challenges such as the complexity of managing diverse cultural, regulatory, and economic environments, which renders the path to international expansion particularly challenging for many firms. For example, according to (Zhang, 2022), despite having sufficient capital and rich experience of domestic success, Chinese companies are facing a high failure rate during internationalization. Therefore, to overcome the liability of foreignness and improve the success rate when entering a foreign market, the relevant mangers should equip with robust cross–cultural competencies, particularly in cross–cultural interaction and adaptability (Fakhreldin, 2021).

In academia, an important concept that reflects cross–cultural competences is cultural intelligence (hereafter CQ), which refers to a person's ability to successfully adapt to new cultural environments (Earley & Ang, 2003). High level of CQ allows individuals to interpret foreign cultural cues accurately and adjust their behavior, then fostering smoother interactions and trust (Rockstuhl & Ng, 2015). Research demonstrates that managers with high CQ are better equipped to handle the complexities of cross–cultural communication and conflict, which can be pivotal for achieving successful cross–cultural outcomes (Sharma, 2019). Therefore, managerial CQ plays a critical role in navigating cross–cultural challenges when businesses pursue internationalization.

CQ is a multidimensional construct comprising four distinct facets of motivational CQ, meta–cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ. These four facets of CQ may work aggregately, they can also function separately (Van Dyne et al., 2012). However, studies exploring the impact of individual dimensions of CQ on cross–cultural outcomes are not many. Furthermore, research about the role of CQ in building top manager's international business networks remains limited, especially for the context of

Chinese managers operating business in foreign countries. This gap is particularly significant, as it is well established in Chinese business philosophy that cultivating robust business networks, also known as business *Guanxi,* is fundamental to achieving business success (Ai, 2006). Thirdly, there are few empirical studies on the interrelationship among four dimensions of CQ. For instance, whether motivational CQ serves as a driving force that enhances meta-cognitive, behavioral, and cognitive CQ. To bridge these gaps, this paper takes Chinese top managers who are managing business in non-China countries as sample to realize three research objectives. This paper is expected to contribute to the research fields of self-determination theory, cross-cultural management and firm's internationalization.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate whether the motivational CQ could directly impact on the other three individual CQ dimensions, namely meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ.

2. To test whether meta-cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ can affect the international business networks of Chinese managers when doing business in foreign countries.

3. To explore how motivational CQ, through its impact on other CQ dimensions, promotes business collaboration and facilitates top managers' business networks in foreign countries.

Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1a: Motivational CQ is positively associated with meta-cognitive CQ.

Hypothesis 1b: Motivational CQ is positively associated with cognitive CQ.

Hypothesis 1c: Motivational CQ is positively associated with behavioral CQ.

Hypothesis 2a: Meta-cognitive CQ is positively related to business networks.

Hypothesis 2b: Cognitive CQ is positively related to business networks.

Hypothesis 2c: Behavioral CQ is positively related to business networks.

Hypothesis 3: Motivational CQ has a positive impact on business networks through mediators of meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ.

Literature Review and Theories

1. Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), provides a comprehensive framework to understand human motivation. According to SDT, people are more likely to experience enhanced intrinsic motivation when the three innate psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met. And when individuals achieve intrinsic motivation, they are more willing to overcome the challenges they are facing (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Empirical research across various domains such as education, personal development, and workplace settings, has consistently demonstrated that intrinsic motivation could promote positive behavioral outcomes and improved performance. For example, study in educational contexts reveal that intrinsic motivation could largely improve study behaviors and boost academic performances (Taylor et al., 2014).

2. Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

CQ is defined as a form of intelligence that represents an individual's ability to function effectively across cultural contexts (Earley & Ang, 2003). It is a multifaceted concept that enables individuals to understand, interpret, and act appropriately in culturally diverse situations (Ang et al., 2007). CQ has been empirically linked to a range of positive outcomes in international and multicultural settings, underscoring its critical role for individuals and organizations alike. Specifically, individuals with high CQ demonstrate greater adaptability, reduce misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions, and foster more productive partnerships (Rockstuhl & Ng, 2015). Accordingly, research shows that high levels of CQ can enhance global leadership effectiveness, expatriate adjustment, cross-cultural interaction, and cross-cultural teamwork (Kim & Van Dyne, 2012).

CQ construct is conceptualized with four specific dimensions, namely meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ. Meta-cognitive CQ involves a person's awareness and control over cultural knowledge and strategies when interacting across cultures (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Cognitive CQ encompasses the general knowledge and understanding of cultural norms, values, and practices across various societies. Motivational CQ reflects the intrinsic interest and desire to adapt and function effectively in culturally diverse environments (Ang et al., 2007). Finally, behavioral CQ entails the ability to modify one's verbal and non-verbal actions to suit different cultural settings. Each

dimension contributes uniquely to an individual's overall capacity for successful cross-cultural interactions.

3. Motivational CQ

Motivational CQ specifically focuses on the intrinsic motivation to adapt across cultural contexts, it highlights individuals' energy, attention, persistence, and drive to engage in cross-cultural interactions and overcome challenges associated with cultural diversity (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). According to Ang et al. (2007), motivational CQ could help reduce cultural shock and anxiety when encountering unfamiliar situations. Research shows that individuals with high motivational CQ tend to show greater resilience, adaptability, and openness, which significantly enhance their ability to operate effectively in diverse settings (Wawrosz & Jurásek, 2023).

Some empirical studies revealed that motivational CQ could enhance intercultural outcomes, such as reduced cultural stress, greater cultural learning, and heightened leadership efficacy in multicultural environments (Aldhaheri, 2017). Organizational research also supports the importance of motivational CQ, showing that it contributes to intercultural team cohesion, knowledge-sharing, and the effective management of culturally diverse teams (Kim & Van Dyne, 2012). Moreover, motivational CQ is found to enhance expatriates' success and overall adaptability in foreign assignments, thus underscoring its value within international business contexts (Presbitero, 2017).

4. Meta-cognitive CQ

Meta-cognitive CQ reflects an individual's capacity for cultural awareness, self-regulation, and strategy adjustment in cross-cultural encounters (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). It is characterized by the processes of planning, monitoring, and revising one's mental frameworks to interpret cultural cues accurately (Rockstuhl & Ng, 2015). Research highlights that meta-cognitive CQ plays a vital role in fostering accurate cultural interpretations and reducing misunderstandings (Bücker, Furrer, Poutsma, & Buyens, 2014). Moreover, individuals with high meta-cognitive CQ engage more effectively in cross-cultural communication as they are willing to adjust their mental frameworks and behavioral strategies to align with diverse cultural expectations (Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009). Besides, meta-cognitive CQ can enhance cultural sensitivity, thereby promoting cross-cultural interactions and business relationships (Charoensukmongkol, 2015).

5. Cognitive CQ

Cognitive CQ represents an individual's knowledge about the norms, practices, and customs across different cultures. It reflects an understanding of facts about other cultures, including economic, social, and legal systems that influence people's behavior (Ng et al., 2009). According to Van Dyne et al. (2012), cognitive CQ allows individuals to draw on knowledge schemas to interpret and respond appropriately to culturally diverse situations. Studies highlight that cognitive CQ plays an essential role in intercultural competence by facilitating quick adaptation to new cultural contexts through information recall and application (Presbitero & Attar, 2018).

6. Behavioral CQ

Behavioral CQ refers to an individual's ability to adapt their verbal and nonverbal actions effectively when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. It is essential for navigating intercultural environments, as it facilitates appropriate adjustments in communication and behavior, thereby reducing misunderstandings and fostering better relationships across diverse groups (Earley & Ang, 2003). Empirical studies have shown that individuals are more adept at managing cross-cultural conflicts (Ang et al., 2007). These findings suggest that behavioral CQ is not only vital for effective communication but also important for enhancing relationship quality in cross-cultural environments.

In summary, SDT provides valuable insights into the role of motivational CQ as a foundational driver that not only directly enhances meta-cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ, but also facilitates effective international business networking. According to SDT, motivational CQ underpins people's ability to acquire cultural knowledge, adjust their behaviors, and strategically build international business networks. Furthermore, the motivational aspect of CQ, as explained by SDT, serves as a catalyst that enhances the other dimensions of CQ, thereby facilitating the formation of robust cross-cultural business networks. Thus, SDT not only supports the theoretical link between motivational CQ and the development of meta-cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ, but also elucidates how these CQ facets collectively contribute to international business networks.
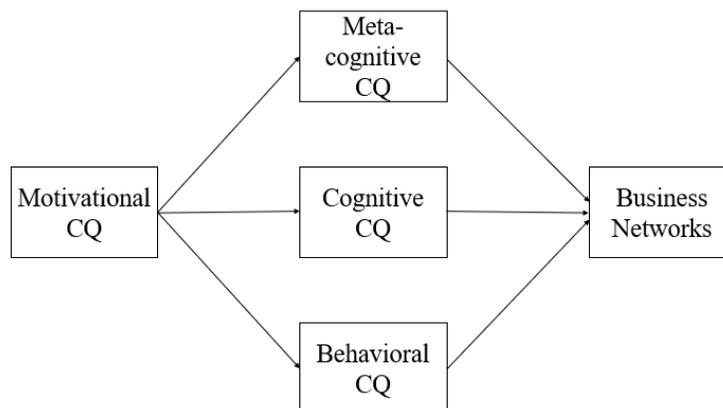
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 The Conceptual Framework of this Research

Research Methodology

Research Design The present study takes quantitative method with a cross-sectional design to investigate interrelationships among variables.

Participants The participants are Chinese top managers who are managing businesses in non-China countries. Participants were selected with purposive sampling. A total of 396 respondents answered the questionnaire completely at the end of the data collection.

Data Collection Methods This research uses an online questionnaire survey to collect data. The questionnaire was uploaded on the online survey platform. Then the corresponding QR code and questionnaire link were sent to participants.

Measurement Instruments Each concept is measured through multi-item scales. The measurement scales of motivational CQ, meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, behavioral CQ and business networks used in the questionnaire were adopted from existing literature, the validity and reliability of each scale were well testified by many previous studies.

Data Analysis Techniques This research took Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as the statistical approach to analyze data. WarpPLS 8.0 was the software to perform the PLS-SEM estimation for this study.

Ethical Considerations The study adhered to ethical guidelines and got ethics approval from our university, ensuring informed consent from participants and keeping confidentiality.

Research Result

1. Characteristics of the Sample

The information about demographic characteristics of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table1 Characteristics of the sample

Demographic Factors	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	321	81.1%
	Female	75	18.9%
Age	20–29 years old	6	1.5%
	30–39 years old	170	42.9%
	40–49 years old	123	31.1%
	50–59 years old	97	24.5%
Education Level	Primary school	8	2.0%
	Secondary school	74	18.7%
	Bachelor's degree	215	54.3%
	Master's degree	88	22.2%
	Doctoral degree	11	2.8%

2. Validity and Reliability Test

To ensure that the results of data analysis are persuasive, it is essential to conduct validity and reliability tests. Regarding the validity test, convergent validity test and discriminant validity test are conducted. In academics, convergent validity is commonly assessed by factor loading analysis techniques. When the value of factor loading for each scale item is greater than 0.5, it indicates convergent validity of model is satisfactory (Hair, Page, & Brunsveld, 2019). The discriminant validity test is passed when the square root of AVE of each construct is greater than its correlations with all other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Both convergent validity test and discriminant validity test in this research are satisfactory. As for the reliability test, the criterion is that the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficients (α) and composite reliability of all latent variables should be greater than 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As is shown in Table 2, all values are above 0.7, indicating a satisfactory result of the reliability test.

Table 2 Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability of all latent variables

Reliability Test	MOT	MCC	COG	BEH	BGX
Composite reliability	0.894	0.833	0.863	0.883	0.875
Cronbach's alpha	0.851	0.732	0.808	0.835	0.825

Note: MOT= motivational CQ, MCC= meta-cognitive CQ, COG= cognitive CQ

BEH= behavioral CQ   BGX= business networks

3. Hypothesis Test

The result of hypothesis test is usually clarified by two metrics. One is the path coefficient (β), and the other is its corresponding P-value. Path coefficient reflects the strength of linkage between variables and p-value reflects the level of statistical significance. The results of hypothesis tests through partial least squares structural equation modeling are summarized in Table 3.

Regarding research objective 1:

Through testing the hypothesis 1a, 1b, 1c, the result shows that motivational CQ has positive impacts on meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ.

Regarding research objective 2:

Through testing the hypothesis 2a, 2b, 2c, the result finds that meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ are positively associated with business networks in cross-cultural contexts.

Table 3 The Result of Hypothesis Test

No.	Hypothesis Path	β	P-value	Result
H1a	Motivational CQ is positively associated with meta-cognitive CQ.	0.65	<0.001	Supported
H1b	Motivational CQ is positively associated with cognitive CQ.	0.66	<0.001	Supported
H1c	Motivational CQ is positively associated with behavioral CQ.	0.70	<0.001	Supported
H2a	Meta-cognitive CQ is positively related to business networks.	0.24	<0.01	Supported

No.	Hypothesis Path	β	P-value	Result
H2b	Cognitive CQ is positively related to business networks.	0.33	<0.001	Supported
H2c	Behavioral CQ is positively related to business networks.	0.20	<0.05	Supported
H3	Motivational CQ has a positive impact on business networks through mediators of meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ.	0.51	<0.001	Supported

Regarding research objective 3:

Through testing hypothesis 3, the indirect effect of motivational CQ on business networks is significant ($\beta=0.51$; $p<.001$). Therefore, the result demonstrates that motivational CQ has a positive impact on business networks through mediating roles of meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ.

Discussion

The first objective of this research is to investigate whether motivational CQ could directly impact the other three individual CQ dimensions, namely meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ. The results support the positive relationship between motivational CQ with meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ. These findings disclose the critical role of motivational CQ in promoting other facets of CQ and whole cultural intelligence. The results corroborate existing literature on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), individuals with stronger intrinsic motivation are more likely to view challenges as opportunities for growth, thereby enhancing their cross-cultural competence.

The second objective of research is to test whether meta-cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ can affect the business networks in cross-cultural environments. The results show that meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ can directly enhance the business networks of Chinese managers in foreign countries. These findings are in line with prior studies on CQ. For instance, research demonstrates that CQ can promote interpersonal trust, interpersonal connection, communication

effectiveness and credibility among stakeholders in cross cultural settings (Bücker et al., 2014; Charoensukmongkol, 2015; Rockstuhl & Ng, 2015).

The third objective of the research is to explore how motivational CQ, through its impact on other CQ dimensions, promotes business collaboration and facilitates top managers' business networks in foreign countries. The result indicates that motivational CQ could indirectly influence business networks of Chinese top mangers' business networks in foreign countries. This finding implies that: when intrinsic motivation is translated into external knowledge and behavior, it can have a positive impact on realistic cross-cultural outcomes. For instance, research indicates that individuals with high motivational CQ not only display a stronger desire to interact with diverse cultures but also exhibit greater effectiveness of cross-cultural interactions (Ang et al., 2007).

New Knowledge from Research

The findings from this research provide insight into enhancing individuals' cultural intelligence. People often equate a person's knowledge with his intelligence; they attribute low cultural intelligence to a lack of cultural knowledge. In fact, intrinsic motivation is the most important factor to influence the whole level of cultural intelligence. By strengthening motivational cultural intelligence, a person can significantly boost the meta-cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of cultural intelligence. Meanwhile, some people living in foreign countries are afraid to make local friends and establish international networks because of language barriers and culture difference. This paper offers new knowledge for boosting cultural intelligence and enhancing international networks. The motivational CQ-driven international business networks model is as the figure 2 follows.

By cultivating intrinsic motivation to deal with unfamiliar culture, individuals have strong desires to acquire, reflect on, and adapt cultural knowledge and behaviors, thus promoting their meta-cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ. In turn, they could interact with foreign people more effectively and confidently, thereby establishing usefully international business networks. Based on this model, people even know nothing about other cultures and countries at the beginning, they can improve their overall cultural competence quickly by strengthening motivational CQ. As a result, people or business managers could get used to life and establish international business networks in foreign countries soon, then they are more likely to achieve business success in foreign countries.
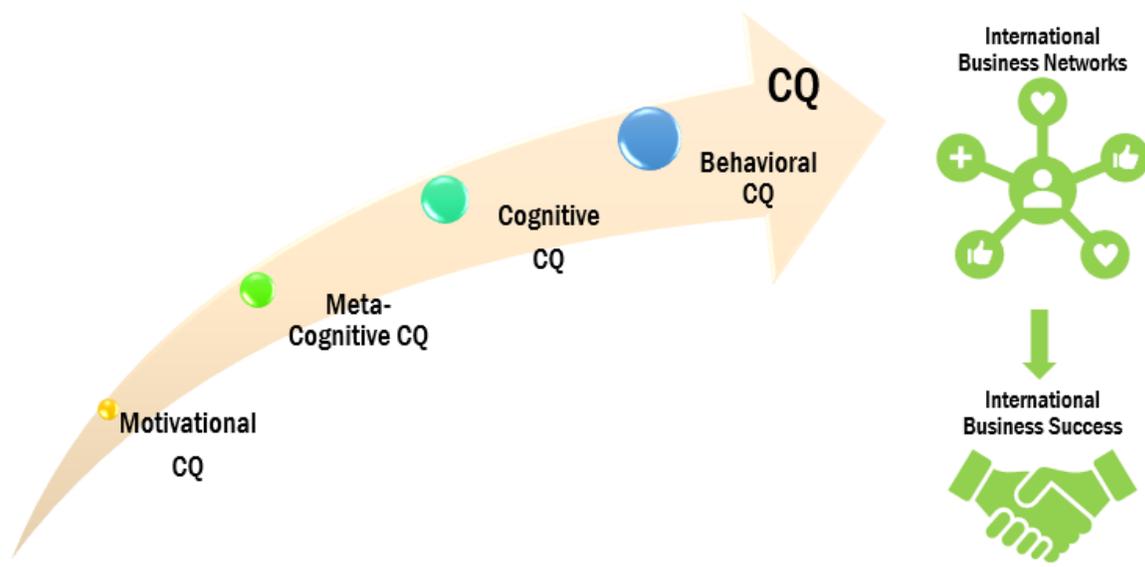
Figure 2 The motivational CQ–driven international business networks model

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that motivational cultural intelligence plays a pivotal role in shaping other aspects of cultural intelligence. Specifically, our findings confirm that motivational CQ directly enhances meta–cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ. Furthermore, these three dimensions are shown to significantly influence the international business networks of Chinese managers operating abroad. Most notably, the research reveals that by bolstering the other CQ dimensions, motivational CQ fosters improved business collaboration and business networks of top managers in international business environments. These results not only enrich the theoretical framework of cultural intelligence but also provide practical insights for managers seeking to navigate and succeed in global business environments.

Contribution

This study makes several academic contributions by advancing our understanding of cultural intelligence in international business contexts. It empirically confirms that motivational CQ not only enhances meta–cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ but also plays a critical role in shaping international business networks among Chinese managers. By linking these dimensions to business collaboration and managerial networking in foreign environments, the research fills a notable gap in the literature and offers a nuanced perspective on the multidimensional nature of CQ.

Practically, these findings underscore the importance of cultivating motivational CQ through targeted training and development programs. Enhancing motivational CQ can indirectly improve other CQ dimensions, thereby equipping managers with the necessary skills to navigate cross-cultural challenges and foster stronger international partnerships, ultimately boosting global business performance.

Suggestions and Recommendation

Based on the research results, the researchers have the following recommendations:

1. Recommendations for applying the research results

First, it is recommended that organizations and policymakers develop targeted training programs focused on enhancing motivational CQ among managers. Such programs should integrate practical exercises and cross-cultural simulations to strengthen meta-cognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ simultaneously. Companies are encouraged to embed these training initiatives into their leadership development curricula, particularly for managers engaged in international business operations. Second, fostering an organizational culture that values cultural adaptability can further support managers in expanding their international business networks. Finally, future policies should consider providing incentives for multinational enterprises to invest in cross-cultural competency development, ensuring that international business leaders are well-equipped to navigate and succeed in diverse global markets.

2. Suggestions for future research

Future research should extend the current study by examining the dynamics of cultural intelligence across various cultural and organizational contexts. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how motivational CQ and other CQ dimensions evolve over time, thus influence international business networks. Additionally, future investigations are encouraged to explore potential mediators and moderators that might further explain the relationship between cultural intelligence and business performance. Besides, incorporating qualitative methods may also enrich our understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving these relationships. These efforts would help refine theoretical models and offer more robust guidance for practitioners operating in diverse global environments.

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