



## THE ROLE OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE GLOBAL ERA\*

บทบาทของความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรมในยุคโลกาภิวัตน์



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### Abstract

In the global era, our economies, cultures, and societies are more intertwined than ever, making cross-cultural competences very important. Cultural intelligence (CQ), a concept like IQ or EQ, reflects an individual's cross-cultural capabilities. This academic article aims to provide a whole picture of CQ research and disclose the implications of CQ for individuals and organizations in the global era. The paper articulates the theoretical framework of CQ, including its multidimensional model of cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ. Furthermore, the paper highlights the positive roles of CQ in different fields. Finally, the paper summarizes CQ's key benefits, offers future research recommendations, and provides suggestions for educators, business managers, and the public. Academically, the present article provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of CQ and lays the groundwork for expanding the study scopes of CQ to education, personal development, human resource management, psychology, and other social science fields.

**Keywords:** Roles; Cultural Intelligence; Global Era

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## บทคัดย่อ

ในยุคโลกาภิวัตน์ เศรษฐกิจ วัฒนธรรม และสังคมของเรามีความเชื่อมโยงกันมากขึ้นกว่าที่เป็น ส่งผลให้เกิดทั้งโอกาสและความท้าทายที่ต้องการให้บุคคลมีแนวคิดเชิงสากล และความสามารถในการทำงานร่วมกันระหว่างวัฒนธรรม เพื่อเผชิญกับความเป็นจริงทางสังคม ในปัจจุบัน ความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรม (Cultural Intelligence, CQ) เปรียบได้กับ IQ หรือ EQ เป็นแนวคิดที่สะท้อนถึงระดับความสามารถของบุคคลในการปรับตัวและทำงานร่วมกันข้ามวัฒนธรรมในยุคโลกาภิวัตน์ บทความทางวิชาการนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อแสดงให้เห็นภาพรวมที่ครอบคลุมเกี่ยวกับงานวิจัยด้านความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรม และแสดงถึงนัยสำคัญของความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรมต่อบุคคลและองค์กรในสังคมร่วมสมัย บทความนี้นำเสนอ กรอบแนวคิดทางทฤษฎีของความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรม โดยเน้นโมเดลเชิงมิติที่ครอบคลุม ด้านการรับรู้ (Cognitive CQ) ด้านอภิปัญญา (Metacognitive CQ) ด้านแรงจูงใจ (Motivational CQ) และด้านพฤติกรรม (Behavioral CQ) นอกจากนี้ บทความยังเน้นให้เห็นถึงบทบาทเชิงบวกของความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรมในหลากหลายสาขา เช่น การปรับตัวข้ามวัฒนธรรม การบริหารจัดการภาวะผู้นำ และการทำงานเป็นทีมในบริบทพหุวัฒนธรรม ท้ายที่สุดบทความนี้สรุปถึงประโยชน์สำคัญของความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรม พร้อมทั้งนำเสนอแนวทางสำหรับการศึกษาวิจัยในอนาคต และให้ข้อเสนอแนะสำหรับนักการศึกษา ผู้บริหารธุรกิจ และสาธารณชนในด้านวิชาการ บทความนี้ถือเป็นโอกาสสำคัญในการพัฒนาความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรม และเป็นพื้นฐานสำหรับการขยายขอบเขตงานวิจัยด้านความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรมไปสู่ การศึกษาด้าน จิตวิทยา การพัฒนาตนเอง การบริหารทรัพยากรมนุษย์ และสาขาอื่น ๆ ทางสังคมศาสตร์

**คำสำคัญ:** บทบาท; ความฉลาดทางวัฒนธรรม; ยุคโลกาภิวัตน์

## Introduction

It is a deeply interconnected world in the global era. Firstly, the rise of the internet, smartphones, and digital platforms allow individuals and businesses to connect and collaborate in real-time, regardless of geographical boundaries, making the world more connected than ever (Imamov & Semenikhina, 2021). Secondly, rapid economic globalization has significantly boosted international investment, the rise of multinational corporations, and the movement of people with businesses operating across borders. Taking Thailand as an example, foreign direct investment (FDI) to Thailand reached \$18.6 billion in 2023, a 72 percent increase in value compared to 2022; the FDI applications in 2024 totaled 832.1 billion baht, a 25% increase from 2023 (BOI, 2024; PRD, 2025). Thirdly, the



movement of people- whether for work, education, or tourism- has become easier and more common. For example, international passengers in 2024 reached 4.2 billion, an increase of 13.6% over 2023 (IATA, 2025). As a result, people from different cultures are more likely to encounter, which requires us to have a global mindset and cross-cultural competences for coping with.

In academia, cultural intelligence (hereafter CQ) is a key concept that reflects global mindset and cross-cultural competences. CQ refers to a person's comprehensive ability to effectively know, understand, and cope with cultural diversity situations (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003). Scholars have viewed CQ as an important competency for individuals to deal with unfamiliar situations under which people have different thinking, motivation, and behavior styles due to cultural differences (Van Dyne, et al., 2015). As globalization continues to interconnect people from different parts of the world, CQ plays a crucial role because it can help individuals and organizations to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural contexts. Therefore, a better understanding of CQ is very important for everyone in the global era.

Although CQ has drawn increasing attention from scholars in the field of cross-cultural management and international business in the past two decades, the public and scholars from other fields, such as education, psychology, and personal development, still know little about CQ. To address this gap, the present article aims to provide a whole picture of CQ research in the past two decades by synthesizing the existing theoretical and empirical studies about CQ. The article also aims to disclose how CQ could play important roles in dealing with cross-cultural environments for individuals and organizations. The importance of this article lies in the pressing need to understand whether CQ is important for the development of individuals and organizations in the global era. This work provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of CQ. It lays the groundwork for expanding the study scopes of CQ to education, psychology, personal development, human resource management, and other social sciences.

## **What Culture Intelligence Is About**

Most scholars conducted CQ research following the theoretical framework developed by Earley & Ang (2003); Ang et al. (2007). Based on multiple



intelligences theory, Earley & Ang (2003) proposed the concept of Cultural Intelligence, which is used to explain why some people deal with unfamiliar cultural contexts more adroitly than others. They defined CQ as 'the capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings' (Earley & Ang, 2003). The construct of CQ was further developed by Ang et al. (2007), who interpreted CQ as “an individual’s capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings”.

By reviewing 129 English peer-reviewed articles on CQ research that were published during year 2003 to 2024, this article found that although there is a slight difference in the expression and description of CQ, all definitions show the same essence of CQ. In short, CQ refers to a person’s competences to understand and effectively cope with cross-cultural situations. It is worth noting that CQ does not mean the capabilities to deal with a specific foreign culture but a set of general capabilities to deal with diverse cultures.

### **What Components CQ Includes**

CQ was originally theorized as a multidimensional construct. It consists of four dimensions, namely meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003). Each dimension may or may not correlate with each other. Meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, and motivational CQ reflect the capabilities of cognition and thinking that reside within mental and psychological systems. In contrast, behavioral CQ reflects the abilities of actual actions (Earley & Ang, 2003). The multidimensional model of CQ is illustrated in Figure 1; each dimension is articulated in the following sub-sections.

#### **Metacognitive CQ**

The first dimension of CQ, metacognitive CQ, is “an individual’s cultural consciousness and awareness during interactions with those from different cultural backgrounds” (Van Dyne et al., 2015). Metacognitive CQ plays a role in planning, monitoring, and revising mental models to fit different backgrounds and cultures (Ang et al., 2015). People with high metacognitive CQ can quickly identify others’ cultural preferences and adjust their mindsets during or after cross-interactions (Ang et al., 2007). Metacognitive CQ is also about a person's strategy for dealing with a different cultural environment. It involves understanding the specific cross-

cultural situation correctly, accurately identifying one's and others' thought patterns, taking strategies appropriately, and adjusting one's pace and mental model to interact with foreigners. (Van Dyne et al., 2010)

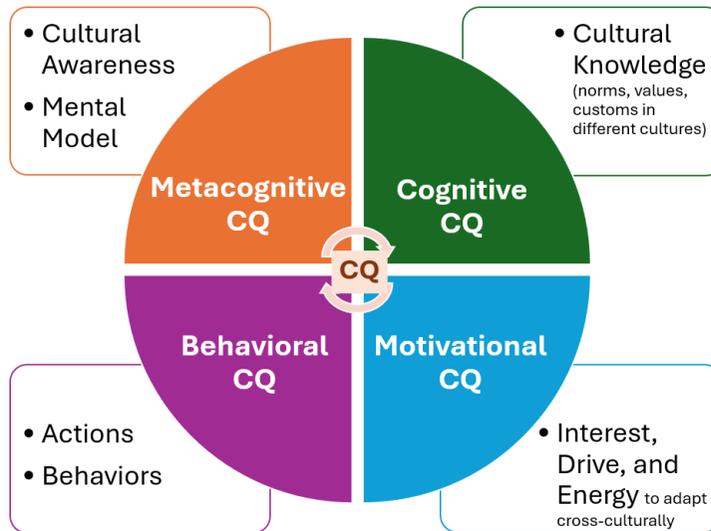


Figure 1: The multidimensional model of CQ

Source: Author's compilation

### Cognitive CQ

The second facet of CQ is cognitive CQ, which represents the knowledge dimension of CQ. It involves the knowledge of cultural universals and cultural differences, such as norms, values, approaches, assumptions, practices, cultural systems, rituals, and conventions in different cultures, which can be acquired through education or personal experiences (Ang et al., 2007; Van Dyne et al., 2015). It also reflects the overall understanding of how culture shapes people's thoughts and behaviors and why their behaviors and interactions vary in different cultural contexts (Van Dyne et al., 2010). In essence, while meta-cognitive CQ reflects the basic logical thinking model and higher-order cognitive processes when dealing with cross-cultural situations, cognitive CQ focuses on an individual's cross-cultural knowledge, which can be learned from various media, books, training, experiences, or other channels.



### **Motivational CQ**

Earley & Ang (2003) argued that cognitive CQ alone does not sufficiently encourage individuals to demonstrate their understanding of the new culture. It is indispensable for an individual to have the desire or motivation to interact in new cultures. Motivational CQ is “an individual’s capability to direct attention and energy toward cultural differences” (Van Dyne et al., 2015). It reflects a person’s interest, drive, and energy to adapt cross-culturally. There are three aspects of motivation involved in motivational CQ: (a) intrinsic motivation—the interest, the enjoyment, and the satisfaction itself when immersed into cross-cultural environments; (b) extrinsic rewards—tangible benefits gained from cross-cultural interaction; (c) self-efficacy—about a sense of meaningfulness, competence, confidence, achievement from culturally diverse experience (Ang et al., 2015; Van Dyne et al., 2012).

### **Behavioral CQ**

The last dimension of CQ is behavioral CQ. Compared with motivational CQ, focusing on innate drive, behavioral CQ emphasizes outward expression during cross-cultural interactions (Van Dyne et al., 2010). It requires individuals to develop appropriate behaviors conforming to their cognition and motivation (Earley & Ang, 2003). This dimension of CQ allows people to manage their social behaviors and adapt verbal and nonverbal actions in intercultural encounters for smooth and effective interactions (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Behavioral CQ involves flexible actions, including overt and covert behaviors (Earley & Ang, 2003). Overt behaviors are observable through communication and language, while covert behaviors involve tones, gestures, eyesight, facial expressions, and other body language. It is worth noting that behavioral CQ is not limited to verbal and nonverbal communication; it also includes the ability to acculturate foreign cultures’ customs, traditions, and lifestyles (Ang et al., 2015).

In summary, each CQ dimension has its focus. Metacognitive CQ represents the strategy level of CQ; cognitive CQ focuses on cross-cultural knowledge, motivational CQ emphasizes intrinsic desires, whereas behavioral CQ concerns extrinsic action.



### **How CQ Play Roles in Cross-Cultural Interactions**

Around 2 decades ago, scholars from different fields found that CQ leads to positive outcomes in cross-cultural interactions. Firstly, CQ is commonly found to facilitate expatriates' cross-cultural adaptation. In terms of psychological adaptation, CQ contributed to cross-cultural adjustment, anxiety, and depression reduction (Wang et al., 2017) and conflict resolution (Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol, 2021). CQ also plays a positive role in behavioral adaptation in cross-cultural settings, such as adaptive selling behavior (Charoensukmongkol, 2020) and voice behavior (Afsar et al., 2018). Secondly, CQ is widely testified to promote individual's job-related performance in cross-cultural backgrounds (Barakat et al., 2015) and organizational performance in the international business arena (Nosratabadi et al., 2020).

Thirdly, CQ is positively associated with aspects of cross-cultural collaboration, such as perceived inclusion, knowledge sharing (Stoermer et al., 2021), knowledge transfer (Vlajčić et al., 2019), team creativity, and team trust (Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol, 2021). Finally, CQ is a vital competency for global leaders as well (Ramsey et al., 2017).

### **How CQ Play Roles in Business Management**

Scholars pointed out that a high CQ of managers could facilitate their decision-making process, customer satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness in international business (Kadam et al., 2019). With higher CQ, managers may identify international business opportunities and make strategic decisions more efficiently in cross-cultural environments. Little evidence shows that managers' high CQ positively impacts business operations and firm performance. For example, Charoensukmongkol (2015) showed that the entrepreneurs' CQ facilitates the development of international networks and the firm performance of SMEs. Vlajčić et al. (2019) provided evidence that a manager's CQ can promote the performance of knowledge transfer in multinational companies. Fakhreldin (2021) verified that managers' CQ could facilitate the internationalization of Egyptian SMEs. All in all, CQ is a crucial capability that drives personal and organizational success in cross-cultural environments.



The positive roles of CQ in cross-cultural environments for persons, teams, and organizations could be categorized into five aspects: cross-cultural adaptation, work-related performance, cross-cultural collaboration, cross-cultural leadership, and organizational performance. The classifications and some evidence of CQ's contribution are sorted out in Table 1.

**Table 1** The Classifications and Evidence on CQ's Contribution

<b>CQ's Role in Cross-Cultural Adaptation</b>	
Malek & Budhwar (2013)	Expatriates' CQ helps promote cross-cultural adjustment in general life, work, and interaction.
Presbitero (2017)	CQ has positive effects on the psychological and sociocultural adaptation of expatriates.
Wang et al. (2017).	CQ lowers depression and promotes satisfaction with life.
Jiang et al. (2018).	There is a positive relationship between CQ and the voice behavior of migrant workers in Australia.
Afsar et al. (2019)	A higher level of CQ is more likely to show voice behaviors for foreign employees working in Thailand hotels.
Akhal & Liu (2019)	CQ has a positive impact on expatriates' adjustment and a negative impact on turnover intentions.
Wawrosz & Jurásek (2023)	CQ predicts the self-efficacy of international students in the Czech Republic.
<b>CQ's Role in Work-related Performance</b>	
Lee & Sukoco (2010)	CQ positively influences expatriates' performance through cultural effectiveness and cultural adjustment.
Malek & Budhwar (2013)	CQ promotes the task and contextual performance of expatriates in Malaysia.
Barakat et al. (2015)	Global managers' CQ positively influences job performance by enhancing job satisfaction.
Jyoti & Kour (2015)	CQ is positively related to the task performance of managers working in Indian banks.
Charoensukmongkol (2020)	Thai salespeople's CQ has a positive effect on their international sales performance.
<b>CQ's Role in Cross-cultural Collaboration</b>	
Vlajčić et al. (2019)	Expatriate managers' CQ positively relates to conventional and reverse knowledge transfer.
Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol (2021)	CQ of cultural minority cabin crew can significantly promote team trust and reduce conflict with others from a cultural majority group.
Stoermer et al. (2021)	CQ promotes organizational embeddedness and knowledge sharing.
<b>CQ's Role in Cross-cultural Leadership</b>	
Groves & Feyerherm (2011)	The CQ level of leaders has a positive relationship with the followers' ratings on leader performance and team performance.
Ansari et al. (2012)	There is a positive relationship between managers' CQ and transformational leadership.
Ersoy (2014)	Expatriate leaders' CQ has a positive impact on their cross-cultural leadership effectiveness.

**Table 1** The Classifications and Evidence on CQ's Contribution (Continued)

Ramsey et al. (2017)	Global leaders' CQ is positively associated with transformational leadership.
<b>CQ's Role in Organizational Performance</b>	
Charoensukmongkol (2015)	The CQ of entrepreneurs in SMEs positively impacts SMEs' export performance.
Kadam et al. (2019).	CQ of the SME owner can directly enhance firm performance.
Pauluzzo (2021)	Owner-managers' CQ can facilitate adaptive strategies and promote the international performance of Italian SMEs.
Nosratabadi et al. (2020)	A leader's CQ has a positive and direct impact on organizational performance.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Overall, this paper claims that CQ, like IQ and EQ, is a concept that deserves the attention of more people from educational institutions, the academic community, the business field, and the public. The paper highlights the significant benefits of CQ for individuals and organizations operating in diverse and globalized environments. Firstly, CQ could help mitigate cross-cultural conflicts and promote cross-cultural communication during cross-cultural interactions. High CQ allows individuals to adjust their communication styles, behaviors, and non-verbal cues that vary across cultures, thereby avoiding misunderstandings and fostering more precise, efficient interactions. Furthermore, CQ could increase team collaboration and productivity. Globalization makes people more likely to live, study, and work with team members from varied cultural backgrounds. Individuals with high CQ can work more effectively in these teams by appreciating cultural differences in work styles, decision-making processes, and perspectives on time and hierarchy.

Besides, CQ is helpful for international companies in understanding consumer preferences, norms, and behaviors from diverse cultural backgrounds. Companies that cultivate CQ among their managers and employees can tailor their products, services, and marketing strategies to resonate with different cultural audiences, resulting in better market penetration and success. In addition, CQ may enhance cross-cultural leadership because it equips managers and leaders to recognize and appreciate the diverse motivations, values, and expectations of employees from different cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, all team members may feel valued and understood, fostering greater employee engagement and



performance. These findings underscore companies' need to integrate CQ training and development programs into their leadership and workforce strategies to maximize competitive advantages in a globalized economy.

In conclusion, CQ is an indispensable cross-cultural competence for every person in the global era. Cultivating CQ could help individuals improve interpersonal interactions in cross-cultural environments, enhance the international reputation of a country's citizens, and be a strategic asset for thriving in the globalized world (Ang et al., 2015). Therefore, the author provides suggestions for educators, scholars, business managers, and the public. Firstly, educators can incorporate lessons on cultural awareness, sensitivity, and adaptability into their curricula, which may prepare the younger generation to face the complex challenges of the global era. Educators can also encourage students to participate in study-abroad programs, cultural exchange activities, or international internships that immerse them in different cultural contexts, enhancing their practical CQ skills. Secondly, scholars of psychology, education, business, and sociology could study CQ from different perspectives. This will help create a more comprehensive understanding of how CQ operates across various disciplines. Scholars can actively disseminate research findings to wider audiences, including educators, policymakers, and business leaders, helping them apply these insights to enhance cross-cultural interactions. Thirdly, business managers should prioritize CQ training for employees, especially those working in international teams or with global clients. High CQ helps better understand local customs, consumer behaviors, and legal systems when expanding into new international markets. Then, companies can apply CQ to design products and services that are culturally appropriate and resonate with diverse customer bases. Fourthly, the public can take an active interest in learning about other cultures through travel, reading, immersing in social media, and engaging in diverse cross-cultural activities. Through exposure to different cultures, they can reduce cultural biases or stereotypes, then foster a more open and inclusive global mindset.



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