



# Umbrella Summary

## Cultural Intelligence

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

### What is cultural intelligence?

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is “a person’s adaptation to new cultural settings and capability to deal effectively with other people with whom the person does not share a common cultural background and understanding” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 34). Note that this is about general capabilities that cut across different cultures, rather than effectiveness in a specific culture (Ang et al., 2015). Though this definition sounds like it includes all types of intercultural interactions, the focus is a bit more limited—work settings and situations that involve differences in race, ethnicity, and nationality, either within or across countries.

CQ is comprised of four factors: metacognition, cognition, motivation, and behavior, and it is most commonly assessed with a 20-item measure called *The Cultural Intelligence Scale* (Ang et al., 2007). Metacognition is loosely described as thinking about thinking; it’s the awareness and understanding of one’s own thought processes. In this context, it is about the thoughts around acquisition and use of cultural knowledge. Example items include “I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions” and “I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures.” Cognition refers to more specific cultural knowledge and is measured with items such as “I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures” and “I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages.” The motivation aspect is the willingness to learn about and engage in intercultural interactions. Example items include “I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures” and “I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.” Finally, the behavior factor focuses on exhibiting appropriate actions and is assessed with items such as “I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it” and “I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.” An expanded framework and measure, with subdimensions for each factor, have also been more recently developed, but there is less research on it thus far (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

### Why is CQ important?

CQ in the workplace is important because it is associated with several work outcomes. Specifically, overall CQ is moderately associated with job satisfaction and job performance (Schlaegel et al., 2021). Different facets of CQ vary in their connections, such that motivational CQ is the strongest predictor of both outcomes, and cognitive CQ is the weakest (Schlaegel et al., 2021). This suggests that interest in intercultural interactions may be more valuable than knowing specific cultural norms. This is good news for those whose jobs involve interactions

across a variety of cultures—not only is it impractical to learn every cultural norm, it may not even be as useful in order to adapt. Several culture-related outcomes have also been commonly examined, and the most relevant one for the field of child welfare is intercultural judgment and decision making (IJDM). IJDM reflects decision quality in hypothetical or real cross-cultural challenges, and it is also moderately associated with CQ (Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018). In this case, the metacognitive facet is most strongly connected, possibly because both involve higher-order thinking. To date, there is insufficient research on the expanded framework to know how the proposed subdimensions relate to work outcomes. More research using the 37-item *Expanded Cultural Intelligence Scale* is needed (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

## What contributes to CQ?

CQ is thought to be a function of both inherent individual differences in tendencies and abilities as well as competencies that are conducive to development (Earley & Ang, 2003). Examination of several personality variables has found a strong connection between being high in CQ and high in emotional intelligence. CQ is also connected with four of the five major personality factors—openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (Schlaegel et al., 2021). There is no connection between CQ and cognitive ability. Overall, findings indicate that certain individual differences may make a person more or less effective in cross-cultural interactions.

Though there is not yet any meta-analytic research on training interventions for improving CQ, such interventions do exist (e.g., Azevedo & Shane, 2019). Thus far, they vary in content and purpose, and most programs are focused on preparing people for international work, so there is little to draw on for use in child welfare. General recommendations, however, are that training should target competencies in all four aspects of CQ, using methods that are aligned with the desired outcomes (Earley & Ang, 2003). Example competencies include planning and monitoring thought processes (metacognition), self-efficacy (motivation), and self-presentation (behavior; Earley & Ang, 2003). For a thorough discussion of the foundational thinking in this area, see Earley & Ang (2003). The expanded CQ framework and measure also provide information that could guide decisions on potential training content (e.g., “I modify the way I disagree with others to fit the cultural setting”; Van Dyne et al., 2012). Though there is preliminary evidence that CQ can be improved through deliberate instruction, more extensive research has shown that experience alone (international experience) has only a modest connection with CQ, which supports the idea that culture-specific knowledge and skills are different from general cultural intelligence, which applies across a variety of intercultural interactions.

## QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Overall CQ is moderately associated with job satisfaction and job performance.
- ▶ Motivational CQ is the strongest predictor of both outcomes, and cognitive CQ is the weakest. This suggests that interest in intercultural interactions may be more valuable than knowing specific cultural norms.

- ▶ CQ is moderately associated with intercultural judgment and decision making, which reflects decision quality in cross-cultural challenges.
- ▶ Certain individual differences may make a person more or less effective in cross-cultural interactions.
- ▶ There is a strong connection between being high in CQ and high in emotional intelligence.
- ▶ CQ is also connected with four of the five major personality factors—openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness.
- ▶ There is no connection between CQ and cognitive ability.
- ▶ There is some research on training interventions for improving CQ, but most programs focus on preparing people for international work, and there is not yet enough to do a meta-analysis to arrive at general findings.
- ▶ International experience is only modestly associated with CQ, which supports the idea that culture-specific knowledge and skills are different from general cultural intelligence, which applies across a variety of intercultural interactions.
- ▶ Practitioners or researchers that would like to assess cultural intelligence should consider the 20-item measure by [Ang et al. \(2007\)](#) or the expanded, 37-item measure by [Van Dyne et al. \(2012\)](#).

## References

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## Suggested Citation

Paul, M. (2021, July 7). *Umbrella summary: Cultural intelligence*. Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development. <https://www.qic-wd.org/umbrella/cultural-intelligence>

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This Summary was developed with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Grant #HHS-2016-ACF-ACYF-CT-1178. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the funder, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the US Department of Health and Human Services.