

Cross-Cultural Business Tips



Author Daniel Tschudy

Winning on the Cross Cultural Battlefields.

Yes but, what is Cultural Intelligence anyway?

People on the move: across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, from South East Asia towards DownUnder, through Southern Africa into South Africa or from Central America to the North. They all, sooner than later, call for jobs, influence our working place, and change our staff structures. Diversity Management becomes a core competence, and Cultural Intelligence, or cultural quotient, a main tool. Only, how to get that 'darn' CQ? Or, even, what is it anyway?

The term CQ was created early this millennium and featured, for example, in the 2006-textbook 'Developing Cultural Intelligence at Work' (ISBN 978-0804771726) by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang. Earley is Dean of the Connecticut School of Business and Soon Ang Professor at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Their book introduces intercultural capabilities as a form of intelligence and explains how to identify and develop Cultural Intelligence, which is...

...an outsider's natural ability to interpret & respond to unfamiliar cultural signals in an appropriate manner.

As per the authors, CQ is distinguished by three core features: the head, or the ability to discover new information about a culture; the heart, or one's motivation and confidence in dealing with a culture; and the body, or the capability to adapt actions and behaviour so that they are appropriate in a new culture. A manager with a high CQ can therefore enter into new cultural settings (professional, organizational, regional, personal) and immediately understand what is happening and why, confidently interact with people, and engage in the right actions.

Filled with real-world examples and case studies, the above-mentioned book explains how to assess one's own skills and improve one's CQ.

Cultural Intelligences requires several capabilities, including motivation, drive, strategy and implementation. Therefore, a motivated manager must have a real interest in other cultural values and behaviours (even if originally 'only' generated through private travel to other countries), and then aim at understanding it.

At the working place, a strategy must be developed to acknowledge cross-cultural situations, and then a concept how to handle differences between management and staff, and among the staff. Or even from employees towards foreign or culturally-different stakeholders, clients and suppliers.



There is a consensus, that diverse workforces, whose members have developed cultural intelligence or proactively entertain their cultural differences, are more productive workforces. And that a diverse team with high cultural intelligence will outperform homogeneous teams.

It's about respect

Understanding employees from other cultures and their daily and sometimes very personal requirements determines effectiveness at the office, influences how conflicts are handled, and shapes the future. While basic social skills and respect for other cultures can be enough, CQ is especially important in stressful situations or in the fast-changing and volatile environment as we see it right now. Without it, mutual distrust can set in, language barriers can grow more divisive, and different people in the group may bring disparate approaches to conflict. But while certain fortunate children might have learned cross-cultural intelligence from their parents, the intelligence is far from being innate for all. So it is a developmental skill that comes with coaching, training, and dialogue; and the working place is one area, where this can be executed well.

To stimulate interests and maximise the participation of all involved, simple tools are available, such as (if suitable): Visual identification of corporate values about diversity; possibly integrated in the Mission Statement. Allow diversity in the set-up & decoration of your offices (Blog-Wall, World Café, etc.). Introduce educational tools to your management team; with printed literature or cross-culture seminars. Install among your staff a diversity-liaison-officer to entertain these topics with activities and dialogue.

Communication is key

Introduce Business-English courses for management and staff in order to continuously improve the quality of communication and reduce misunderstandings or accidental cross-cultural insults. And mix foreign with local employees in a best-possible fashion in order to avoid the formation of minority groups. Finally, activate and stimulate a regular and ongoing topic-relevant dialogue about differences.

About the Author



Daniel Tschudy is speaker, coach and consultant about cross-cultural issues and cross-border competences in the global business environment.

He focuses mainly on the emerging markets in Africa, Arabia and Asia; and often features Japan and China.

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