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Beyond International Experience: The Strategic Role of Cultural Intelligence for Executive Selection in IHRM

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INTRODUCTION

International assignments are becoming more frequent and complex in organizations. Selecting individuals who are equipped to manage cross-cultural challenges therefore takes on a more significant and strategic role. Yet, selection decisions for staffing international assignments typically rely on informal and low-utility selection criteria such as international experience. This chapter advances the conceptual and applied benefits of using cultural intelligence as a selection tool to identify those with international executive potential. Specifically, we highlight the role of cultural intelligence as a set of dynamic learning capabilities that will enable individuals to transform their international experience into effectiveness. Our central thesis is that previous international experiences do not necessarily translate into learning and effectiveness; rather, the experience–effectiveness relationship is moderated by cultural intelligence, such that individuals with high cultural intelligence are more likely to leverage their experiences to enhance performance, compared to those with low cultural intelligence. Our model also explains why existing findings on international experience and adjustment have been inconsistent and weak. We conclude with a discussion on the theoretical and practical implications of our model for International Human Resource Management (IHRM).

Selecting executives who could function effectively in international joint ventures and multinational enterprises constitutes a central theme in the contemporary research and practice (Sparrow *et al.*, 2004; Schuler and Tarique, 2007; Ang and Van

Dyne, 2008) of IHRM. An early focus of IHRM research was on the selection criteria of expatriates, due to the high rates of premature return of expatriates in the United States in the 1970s (Baker and Ivancevich, 1971; Tung, 1981; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). Today, the nature of international assignments has changed considerably (Collings *et al.*, 2007). Instead of relying on conventional longer-term expatriate assignments, organizations are increasingly adopting alternative forms of international assignments that are shorter in duration (Dowling and Welch, 2004; Mayrhofer *et al.*, 2004; Suutari and Brewster, this volume Chapter 7).

This growing trend has two major selection implications for organizations and their employees:

1. Challenges associated with international assignments are no longer contained within the exclusive realm of expatriate management. With the popular use of short-term, frequent-flyer international assignments, and virtual global teams in organizations (Collings *et al.*, 2007), the challenges of selecting employees who can be effective in these increasingly important roles apply to a broader group of employees – rather than a limited number of expatriates (Sparrow, 2007).
2. International assignments have also taken on more complex forms of managing cross-border alliances such as mergers and acquisitions and international joint ventures (Schuler *et al.*, 2004; Stahl and Mendenhall, 2005).

When organizations must select employees who can operate in short-term assignments set against a fast-paced and more integrated business environment (Friedman and Berthoin Antal, 2005; Morley *et al.*, 2006), the selection challenges are different from, and perhaps even more complex than, those associated with conventional expatriate assignments that deal primarily with coping and adjusting in one culture (Nardon and Steers, 2007). Moreover, many international employees in practice have to understand, adapt to and personally maintain multiple cultures (Sackmann, this volume Chapter 22).

Taken together, selection of employees equipped to deal with cross-cultural challenges takes on an even more important and significant role for managers and organizations, given the broader scope and increased cultural diversity and complexity of international assignments in today's business landscape. Yet, selection decisions for staffing international assignments have been, and continue to be, based on informal and low-utility selection strategies and criteria (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006). International experience, for instance, remains a prevalent criterion used by organizations to staff international assignments (Carpenter *et al.*, 2001; Daily *et al.*, 2000; Kealey, 1996). The justification, other than expedience, is the assumption that as experience increases, the ability to do the job also increases (Guion, 1998; Stokes *et al.*, 1994). The received wisdom is that individuals with past experiences in intercultural settings are assumed to have honed their cross-cultural skills and knowledge, and hence, will be more effective in dealing with intercultural encounters.

Empirical support, however, for the effect of international experience on expatriate adjustment and performance has been meager. The meta-analysis by Hechanova *et al.* (2003) on adjustment to overseas assignment found an estimated population

correlation of 0.08 between expatriates' previous international assignment and their work adjustment. In a more recent meta-analysis by Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.* (2005a), previous overseas experience explained less than 1% of the variance in interaction adjustment ($\rho = 0.13$) and work adjustment ($\rho = 0.06$), prompting the authors to conclude that 'Contrary to conventional wisdom and some academic arguments, the accumulated evidence shows that prior overseas assignments are only minimally helpful for present adjustment' (p. 272).

In reflecting on the weak relationship between international experience and intercultural effectiveness outcomes such as overseas work adjustment, scholars have begun to consider other approaches. For instance Takeuchi *et al.* (2005) attributed weak results to the overly simplistic conceptualization of international experience. Building on a more sophisticated conceptualization that differentiates different types of international experience, their results enable a better understanding of the role of international experience.

The objective of this chapter is to further our understanding of the theoretical and practical utility of using international experience for selection purposes. We do this by building on the work of Ng *et al.* (2007) to explicate another rationale for the traditionally weak empirical effects of international experience. Specifically, Ng *et al.* (2007) drew on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory to develop the argument that individuals differ in the extent to which they benefit from international experiences. This is because some people are better able to translate and transform their experiences into useful knowledge they can use to guide future cross-cultural interactions.

Based on these arguments, we advance the argument in this chapter that the usefulness of past international experience in predicting future intercultural effectiveness depends on the individual's cultural intelligence – a set of cross-cultural capabilities that describe a person's capacity to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Earley and Ang, 2003). Increasingly, cultural intelligence has been noted by scholars as 'an important individual characteristic that facilitates cultural adaptation and performance' (Gelfand *et al.*, 2007: 497), and 'a promising framework for understanding intercultural interactions' (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005a, b: 274). Hence, our examination of cultural intelligence as a set of dynamic capabilities that affect how individuals adapt and perform in novel cultural settings is timely and important for understanding effectiveness in contemporary international assignments. This approach also responds to recommendations for systematic research on the role of malleable competencies in predicting inter-cultural effectiveness (Shaffer *et al.*, 2006).

The theoretical model that we develop draws on Earley and Ang's (2003) multi-dimensional conceptualization of cultural intelligence, and more recent theorizing by Ng *et al.* (2007) on cultural intelligence as a set of learning capabilities that maximizes the developmental benefits of international assignments. Overall, we propose that culturally intelligent individuals are better able to leverage their prior international experiences in ways that enhance their effectiveness in international assignments (compared to those with low cultural intelligence). Thus, we aim to offer a novel explanation for the generally weak relationship between international experience and intercultural effectiveness.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. We start with an overview of theory and research on experience and performance (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2005; Tesluk and Jacobs, 1998) as well as theory and research on cultural intelligence (Earley and Ang, 2003). We then describe experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), with an emphasis on how cultural intelligence enhances the four stages of experiential learning in ways that allow those with high cultural intelligence to translate and transform their experiences into effectiveness. Thus, our theoretical model proposes that cultural intelligence functions as a set of moderators that strengthen the experience–effectiveness relationship. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of applying our model and using cultural intelligence as a selection tool for international staffing.

EXPERIENCE AND PERFORMANCE

The acquisition of knowledge and skills required for effective performance is the linchpin of research on experience and performance outcomes. Tesluk and Jacobs' (1998) integrated model of work experience asserts that previous experience facilitates the learning and development of knowledge and skills, motivation, as well as attitudes that are critical for effective performance in organizations. Schmidt *et al.*'s (1986) meta-analytic path model analysis supports the contention that learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills is a primary reason for the importance accorded to work experience.

In the context of international experience, Takeuchi and colleagues (2005) argued that individuals who have had more previous assignments (i.e., previous experience), or are further into their current assignments (i.e., current experience), are more likely to experience better adjustment in their international assignments because they have information that helps to overcome their initial uncertainty, and they have had more opportunities to learn appropriate behaviors through direct and vicarious modeling (Bandura, 1997). More specifically, Takeuchi and colleagues demonstrate that previous international experience acts as a buffer for expatriates in their current overseas assignment. The amount of time expatriates have into their current assignment has less impact on adjustment when expatriates have greater previous international experience. On the other hand, the amount of current experience has greater impact on adjustment when expatriates have little previous international experience. This suggests that expatriates, through their previous international experience, acquire knowledge and skills that buffer them from the challenges of adjusting to new international assignments.

Yet, research has recognized that not all individuals learn equally from their experiences. As McCauley (1986: 20) pointed out, 'Events provide a stimulus to learn; the actual response of learning itself is never a sure thing'. Likewise, Tesluk and Jacobs (1998: 333) noted that 'Learning does not often automatically follow from experience' because individual differences and contextual characteristics of the environment influence 'what is extracted from work experiences' (p. 333). We suggest that these factors moderate the experience–effectiveness relationship, which partly account for the traditionally weak results found in the domestic and international

experience literatures. In the current context of international assignments, we argue that cultural intelligence is an important set of individual difference characteristics that can moderate the relationship between international experience and intercultural effectiveness, such that those with higher cultural intelligence are better able to benefit from international experiences.

CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

Cultural intelligence (CQ) refers to an individual's capabilities to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings (Earley and Ang, 2003). CQ is a timely concept given the prevalence and importance of effective cross-cultural interactions and management. The conceptualization of CQ is drawn from Sternberg and Detterman's (1986) research, which integrates multiple perspectives of intelligence to propose four complementary ways of conceptualizing individual-level intelligence:

- (1) metacognitive intelligence refers to awareness and control of cognitions used to acquire and understand information;
- (2) cognitive intelligence refers to knowledge and knowledge structures;
- (3) motivational intelligence acknowledges that most cognition is motivated and thus focuses on the magnitude and direction of energy as a locus of intelligence; and
- (4) behavioral intelligence focuses on individual capabilities at the action level (behavior).

This framework is noteworthy because it recognizes multiple forms of intelligence (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008), unlike traditional research that has focused narrowly on linguistic, logical-mathematical and spatial intelligence, and ignored forms of intelligence related to self-regulation and interpersonal relations (Gardner, 1993).

Drawing on this multidimensional perspective of intelligence, Earley and Ang (2003) conceptualized CQ as a multidimensional construct with mental (metacognitive and cognitive), motivational, and behavioral components. Metacognitive CQ is the capability for consciousness and awareness during intercultural interactions. It reflects mental capabilities to acquire and understand culturally diverse situations and includes knowledge of and control over individual thought processes (Flavell, 1979) relating to culture. Relevant capabilities include planning, monitoring, and revising mental models. Those with high metacognitive CQ are consciously aware and mindful of cultural preferences and norms before and during interactions. They question cultural assumptions and adjust mental models during and after experiences (Nelson, 1996).

While metacognitive CQ focuses on higher-order cognitive processes, cognitive CQ focuses on knowledge of norms, practices, and conventions in different cultural settings acquired from education and personal experiences. This includes knowledge of economic, legal, and social systems of different cultures (Triandis, 1994). Individuals with high cognitive CQ are able to anticipate and understand similarities and differences across cultural situations. As a result, they are more likely to have

accurate expectations and less likely to make inaccurate interpretations of cultural interactions (e.g., Triandis, 1995).

In addition to mental capabilities that foster understanding of other cultures, CQ also includes the motivational capability to cope with ambiguous and unfamiliar settings. Motivational CQ is the capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences, and is based on the expectancy-value theory of motivation (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002) that includes intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 2002). Those with high motivational CQ experience intrinsic satisfaction and are confident about their ability to function in culturally diverse settings.

The fourth aspect of CQ recognizes that cultural understanding (mental) and interest (motivational) must be complemented with behavioral flexibility to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions, based on cultural values of a specific setting (Hall, 1959). Thus, behavioral CQ is the capability to exhibit situationally-appropriate behaviors from a broad repertoire of verbal and non-verbal behaviors, such as being able to exhibit culturally appropriate words, tones, gestures, and facial expressions (Gudykunst *et al.*, 1988).

To date, CQ research has extended the conceptualization and theoretical grounding of CQ (e.g., Ng and Earley, 2006; Triandis, 2006) to examine relationships with important variables. For instance, Ang *et al.* (2006) demonstrates that the Big 5 personality, particularly openness to experience and extraversion, is associated with CQ. More recently, Ang *et al.* (2007) demonstrate in a series of studies that after controlling for cross-cultural experience, general mental ability, and other relevant individual differences, cognitive CQ and metacognitive CQ have incremental predictive validity in explaining variance in individuals' cultural judgment and decision making; motivational CQ and behavioral CQ predict cultural adaptation; while metacognitive CQ and behavioral CQ predict task performance of international executives. In another study of global professionals, Templer *et al.* (2006) found that motivational CQ predicts cultural adjustment above and beyond realistic job and living conditions previews, hence providing direct evidence of the importance of CQ for expatriates and international assignees. CQ also enhances interpersonal trust of members in multicultural teams (Rockstuhl and Ng, 2007), as well as increases joint profits of intercultural negotiating dyads (Imai and Gelfand, 2007). Taken together, these empirical findings suggest that CQ, as a distinctive individual difference, is a relevant and critical individual attribute that has implications for effectiveness in intercultural settings.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

In a recent conceptual paper on cultural intelligence and global leadership development, Ng and colleagues (2007) applied Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory to explicate ways that global leaders can maximize the developmental benefits of international assignments. Drawing on the multidimensional conceptualization of CQ, they take a systematic approach to describe processes through which

experiences are translated into learning and effectiveness, as well as the corresponding individual capabilities for effective learning from these experiences.

Recognizing the importance of CQ as a set of learning capabilities is aligned with the recent emphasis in the expatriate and international management literatures on 'ability to learn', rather than end-state competencies (Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997). Spreitzer and colleagues, for instance, argue that end-state competencies are constructed on the basis of past successes and hence may ignore competencies required for future performance. In contrast, the ability to 'learn on the fly' from experiences in today's fast-paced and dynamic multicultural environments (Nardon and Steers, 2007) is an essential attribute that distinguishes high-performing employees, managers, and expatriates from average or mediocre performers.

Experiential learning theory (ELT) provides a strong theoretical foundation for thinking about specific ways that those with high CQ can learn from their experiences and accordingly enhance their effectiveness. In essence, Kolb (1984) synthesized earlier theories on experiential learning (Dewey, 1938) to argue that effective learning from experiences requires the learner to grasp the experience and transform the experience into meaningful learning. Further, Kolb (1984) proposed two opposing modes of grasping experience (concrete experience and abstract conceptualization) and two opposing modes of transforming experience (reflective observation and active experimentation).

Together this forms a four-stage experiential cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Thus, the ELT model portrays a learning cycle where the learner 'touches all the bases' of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting – in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Specific tangible episodes or events (concrete experiences) are the basis for descriptive processing (reflective observations) which are then assimilated and distilled into conceptual interpretations (abstract conceptualization), and become the basis for action (active experimentation). This fourth step (active testing ideas in the real world) generates new experiences for the learner and triggers another cycle of learning: concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

Based on this model, Kolb and colleagues argue that individuals who are able to balance the tensions in learning styles and integrate the dual dialectics of grasping experience and transforming experience will be more effective (e.g., Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Mainemelis *et al.*, 2002). Building on this argument, Ng and colleagues (2007) position CQ as a set of learning capabilities that influence the extent to which individuals engage in the four learning modes of experiencing, reflecting, observing, and acting when exposed to cross-cultural interactions and situations. We describe links between CQ and each of the four learning modes below. The theoretical model is shown in Figure 5.1.

Concrete experience

Ng and colleagues (2007) propose that two CQ dimensions – motivational CQ and behavioral CQ – affect the amount and quality of concrete experiences that individuals seek during international assignments. Social cognitive theory (Bandura,

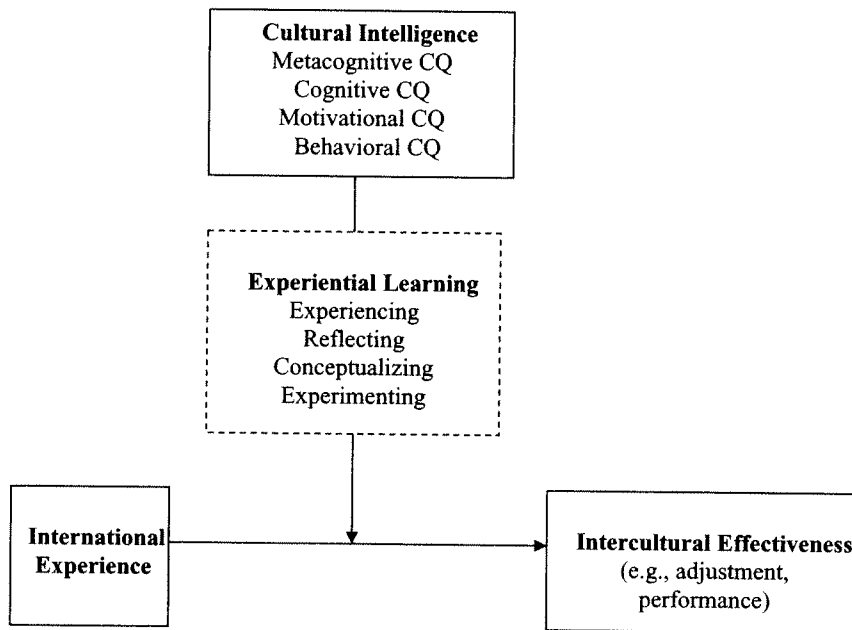


FIGURE 5.1 Theoretical model of cultural intelligence and experiential learning.

2002) suggests that individuals who are more confident of their ability to complete a particular task are more likely to initiate effort, persist in their efforts and perform better. Given that intercultural interactions are typically stressful because of unfamiliar cultural norms and cues (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Oberg, 1960; Shaffer *et al.*, 2006), Ng *et al.* argue that only those with high motivational CQ – who are interested in and feel efficacious in cross-cultural settings – are more likely to actively seek cross-cultural experiences during their international assignments.

Behavioral CQ is also relevant to the amount and quality of concrete experiences that individuals seek because gaining concrete experiences requires people to engage with the environment and interactions with others (Ng *et al.*, 2007). As such, those with good interpersonal competencies (Kolb, 1984) are better able to build relationships with culturally-different individuals. This, in turn, creates more opportunities for cross-cultural contact that facilitates learning (Yamazaki and Kayes, 2004).

Reflective observations

Cognitive CQ and metacognitive CQ are important for reflective observation (Ng *et al.*, 2007). Individuals high in cognitive CQ possess elaborate cultural schemas, defined as mental representations of patterns of social interaction characteristic of particular cultural groups (Triandis *et al.*, 1984). Having elaborate cultural schemas enhances conceptually-driven information processing (Taylor and Crocker, 1981) and enables more accurate identification and understanding of cultural issues. Thus, those with high cognitive CQ are more aware of what cues to look for during intercultural encounters. They are also less likely to make negative evaluations of cultural

norms and behaviors which allow them to be more objective and accurate in their observations and reflections of cross-cultural experiences (Osland and Bird, 2000).

Reflective observation also requires a high level of metacognitive CQ – thinking about thought processes related to cross-cultural experiences (Ng *et al.*, 2007). Those with high metacognitive CQ monitor and think about their own assumptions, beliefs, and emotions as well as the way they process external environment and behavioral cues provided by others. They are more active in their cognitive processing of observations as they create new categories in their memory storage and actively consider multiple perspectives in making sense of their experiences (Flavell, 1979). Hence, they are better able to engage in the learning mode of reflective observation.

Abstract conceptualization

The third stage of experiential learning requires learners to distill their reflections into more general concepts that can guide their future actions. As with reflective observation, cognitive CQ and metacognitive CQ are key to abstract conceptualization (Ng *et al.*, 2007). This is because those with more extensive knowledge of culture have better-organized knowledge structures with stronger linkages among domain-related concepts. This allows them to conceptualize problems more efficiently and effectively in terms of relevant principles (cf. Chase and Simon, 1973; Chi *et al.*, 1982). Thus, individuals with high cognitive CQ are more accurate and effective in developing general ideas and conceptual interpretations of culture. On the other hand, without a fundamental understanding of cultural concepts (low cognitive CQ), individuals are less able to integrate insights and reflections about particular experiences into coherent knowledge structures about culture. This, in turn, impedes formation of higher-order concepts and theories.

Metacognitive CQ is also directly relevant to abstract conceptualization because many cross-cultural situations do not fit typical norms or tendencies (Ng *et al.*, 2007), even when expectations are based on scientific and rigorous research (Osland and Bird, 2000). Having the metacognitive CQ capability of thinking about thinking is important for abstract conceptualization because it enables people to be open to disconfirming experiences. Thus, individuals with high metacognitive CQ are more likely to analyze new cross-cultural experiences without being biased or constrained by past experiences or expectations. They are also better able to translate their insights from a particular experience into more general concepts and accurate interpretations that can be applied to other cultural contexts.

Active experimentation

The last stage of the ELT model is actively testing and experimenting to see if enhanced understanding fits reality. Since active experimentation involves the entire person, all four CQ capabilities are important (Ng *et al.*, 2007). First, cognitive CQ and metacognitive CQ are important because they enable learners to organize and map out action plans. Action, without clear goals and plans is less likely to produce desired outcomes. Thus, those with an enhanced understanding of culture

(cognitive CQ) and those who have clear plans and strategies for action (metacognitive CQ) are more likely to follow-through and test their ideas and understanding.

Motivational CQ is also important for active experimentation because those with the desire and self-efficacy to deal with cross-cultural interactions tend to seek and persist in challenging cross-cultural situations (Bandura, 2002). Moreover, given that self-efficacy is a 'generative capability in which cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral subskills must be organized and effectively orchestrated to serve innumerable purposes' (Bandura, 1997: 37), having high motivational CQ enables learners to carry out sequences of action steps to achieve specific goals (Earley *et al.*, 2006).

Finally, since active experimentation typically involves interaction, behavioral CQ is also critical for effectiveness in cross-cultural interactions. Having the capability to adapt verbal and non-verbal behaviors to specific cultural contexts provides people with greater latitude for experimentation. In other words, those with high behavioral CQ are less constrained and better situated to implement and test their ideas.

TRANSLATING AND TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE INTO EFFECTIVENESS

Having summarized ways in which the four dimensions of CQ are relevant to the four stages of experiential learning, we return to our opening point – that CQ can be used as a tool to identify those most likely to benefit from international experience. Specifically, we argue that particular CQ capabilities can be linked to specific stages of experiential learning and those high in all four CQ capabilities are best suited to capitalize on the learning opportunities available from international experience because they will experience the full range of experiential learning. Thus, we propose that employees need to engage repeatedly in all four stages of experiential learning (concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) to maximise their learning from international assignments.

This also implies that those who are low in specific CQ capabilities will have the tendency to short-circuit the experiential learning cycle. For instance, individuals with high motivational CQ and high behavioral CQ may seek many concrete experiences during their international assignments. However, without the cognitive CQ and metacognitive CQ capabilities, they lack the observational skills and conceptual understanding to transform their experiences into knowledge to guide them in future interactions. Conversely, those with high cognitive CQ and high metacognitive CQ may develop sophisticated understanding of different cultures, but without the motivation or behavioral flexibility to venture out into new cultural settings, cross-cultural learning for these individuals remains an intellectual exercise that lacks the surprises and shocks that often jolt people into discovery and growth (Hall *et al.*, 2001).

In sum, we propose an important caveat to the conventional axiom about the value of international experiences: not all individuals benefit from international experiences because they are not all capable of translating and transforming their experiences into useful knowledge to guide their future cross-cultural interactions.

Thus, based on Ng *et al.*'s (2007) positioning of CQ as a set of learning capabilities that allows individuals to enhance their learning during intercultural encounters, we argue that CQ capabilities moderate the relationship between international experience and intercultural effectiveness, such that the relationships between international experience and intercultural effectiveness is stronger for individuals with high CQ, compared to those with low CQ. This is because those with high CQ are more likely to engage in all four learning modes of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and experimenting, and they are better able to learn from and leverage their past international experiences in ways that enhance their intercultural interactions and adjustment in international assignments.

Thus far, we have explicated how cultural intelligence enhances experiential learning in ways that strengthen the link between international experience and effectiveness in international assignments. We now highlight the theoretical and practical implications of using CQ as a selection tool to identify those most likely to benefit from international experiences.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although it seems intuitively logical that previous experience should have implications for future performance, empirical research on international experience and cross-cultural effectiveness has generally produced weak findings. Our goal in this chapter has been to advance a conceptual rationale that might elucidate reasons for these prior research results while providing a strong conceptual foundation for future empirical research. Thus, we have argued that individuals vary in their ability to learn from experiences. More important, we propose that cultural intelligence affects the extent to which individuals can leverage their previous international experiences through experiential learning.

Although scholars have highlighted the importance of understanding individual differences in people's ability to learn from their experiences (e.g., Tesluk and Jacobs, 1998; McCauley, 1986; Seibert, 1996), we are not aware of research that has positioned individual differences – such as CQ – as moderators to the relationship between international experience and intercultural effectiveness. Hence, little is known about the boundary conditions to the widely-accepted truism that those with greater international experience are more effective in multicultural and international settings. Our model integrates CQ and experiential learning to provide systematic explanations for why individuals differ in their ability to benefit from international experiences. Thus, the model should help to enhance the predictive validity of selection research on international experience and intercultural effectiveness such as cross-cultural adjustment and performance in culturally diverse settings.

Our model also highlights cultural intelligence as a set of learning capabilities. Thus, we go beyond prior research that has emphasized cultural intelligence as a set of performance capabilities (Ang *et al.*, 2007; Imai and Gelfand, 2007; Rockstuhl and Ng, 2007; Templer *et al.*, 2006). We suggest that viewing CQ as a set of learning capabilities has special relevance to theories and research on selection – especially

to selection in the context of the changing nature of international assignments and the increasingly multicultural nature of work groups and organizations. Thus, we reinforce Spreitzer and colleague's (1997) emphasis on 'ability to learn' as a critical selection tool and predictor of international executive potential. Specifically, Spreitzer and colleagues identified three qualities that reflect a proactive approach to learning and have direct implications for international selection: seeks opportunities to learn, cross-culturally adventurous, and openness to criticisms.

Our model acknowledges and builds on existing work in two ways:

1. Rather than using an inductive list of attributes and qualities to examine individual differences in ability to learn from international experiences (Spreitzer *et al.*, 1997), we applied the cultural intelligence conceptual framework to provide a more comprehensive and theoretically-grounded basis for identifying capabilities with relevance to international selection.
2. It extends the conceptualization of experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) by explicating ways that cultural intelligence should enhance experiential learning.

Taken together, we aim to provide a more theoretical approach to thinking about ways that individual capabilities such as CQ enhance experiential learning and thus can enhance the conceptualization of selection processes and tools specifically for jobs with international and multicultural responsibilities.

We recommend future research that tests our predictions. This should include identification of intercultural effectiveness outcomes that are relevant to the specific study context, as well as a careful delineation of specific types of international experiences, drawing on Takeuchi and colleagues' (2005) framework.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Given that organizations are increasingly emphasizing international assignments as a means of providing employees with cross-cultural experiences to equip them for the challenges of the global business environment, having a better understanding of how and whether these assignments achieve their intended goals should offer important practical insights organizations can use in selecting and training individuals for international assignments. When organizations view experiential learning and development as important components of international assignments, selecting individuals who are more likely to learn and hence, benefit from their international assignments, is critical. Thus, we recommend cultural intelligence as a selection tool that identifies those best able to benefit from international assignments.

CQ, as a malleable capability that can be enhanced over time, also has training and development implications. Based on our model, providing CQ training and development should help to prepare and equip employees with international responsibilities to do their jobs better. Our approach also has the added benefit of ensuring that real-time dynamic learning occurs during the international assignment. These sorts of programs would entail moving beyond traditional cross-cultural

training methods that focus on cultural knowledge (cognitive CQ). Instead, they would also need to emphasize metacognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ.

Earley and Peterson (2004) described training interventions that target these CQ capabilities. These include cognitive structure analysis for examining knowledge structures and enhancing awareness and reflection (metacognitive CQ). They also include interventions that help employees internalize the goal of getting engaged in the local culture (motivational CQ). Finally training interventions can also use dramaturgical exercises such as role-plays and simulations involving physical, emotional, and sensory processes that help employees enhance their behavioral flexibility (behavioral CQ).

Finally, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which highlights four stages of learning involving experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing and experimenting, has important implications for the design of international assignments. Expatriate assignments entail demanding work responsibilities and often include generous pay packages with expensive cars and exclusive homes that can isolate employees from the host-country culture. Likewise, short-term overseas trips that emphasize efficient and effective travel can shelter employees in a 'bubble' that separates them from direct and meaningful contact with the local culture (Oddou *et al.*, 2000).

To avoid this sort of isolation, Kolb and Kolb (2005) emphasized the importance of providing 'space' – physical, mental, and psychological – so that employees feel they can (and should) participate actively in all four stages of experiential learning. For example, Ng and colleagues (2007) described specific organizational interventions that can promote the four modes of experiential learning during an international assignment. Organizations can emphasize developmental aspects and benefits of international assignments so that employees view assignments as more than short-term performance challenges. This should encourage them to be more culturally adventurous and curious. It also should promote more concrete and meaningful interactions with locals which should increase their sense of being engaged by the local culture (Osland and Osland, 2006).

To stimulate reflective observation after a cross-cultural experience, international assignees could be trained and encouraged to write a journal documenting their cross-cultural experiences and learning points (Oddou *et al.*, 2000). These reflections should focus on a deep examination of expectations and cultural assumptions of parties involved in interactions, rather than superficial descriptive observations of the incident. Over time, individuals can compare their experiences and learning points to gain further insights and more general cultural understanding to guide future interactions. Thus, training that helps individuals to develop inductive logic and reasoning skills to translate specific observations into more abstract and general understanding of their cross-cultural interactions is particularly important for ensuring that employees learn from their experiences and apply this to future interactions and assignments.

Finally, to encourage international assignees to test their newly acquired insights and ideas, organizations can provide incentives and resources that encourage employees to set specific and measurable developmental goals for exploration and experimentation. They also should make sure that reward systems do not

contradict or dampen the importance of development. For example, if goals emphasize short-term business results, employees will be less likely to maximize experiential learning opportunities. Another organizational option would be to provide coaching and mentoring resources to support the experimentation processes and provide employees with feedback. All of these should promote active learning (e.g., McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002; Oddou *et al.*, 2000).

CONCLUSION

The nature and context of international assignments has altered significantly. With emerging alternatives (see Suutari and Brewster, this volume Chapter 7) such as short-term and frequent flyer assignments, cross-cultural challenges are no longer limited to expatriates. Moreover, these alternative forms of international assignments may create challenges that are more complex in nature. This is because many of these assignments are implemented on short notice and lack the luxury of pre-departure training that is often provided for expatriates on longer-term assignments (Nardon and Steers, 2007; Sparrow *et al.*, 2004). This further heightens the importance of selecting employees based on their ability to learn dynamically from their international experiences. In other words, this makes the role of CQ as a strategic selection tool even more promising.

Given that international experience continues to be a commonly used criterion for staffing international assignments – despite weak empirical evidence that it predicts cross-cultural effectiveness (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005a, b; Hechanova *et al.*, 2003) – this chapter seeks to provide a more in-depth understanding of methods of using CQ as a selection tool that can enhance experiential learning and thus strengthen the relationship between experience and effectiveness for employees with international responsibilities. We concur with existing research which argues that not all individuals are able to learn from and leverage their international experiences (Tesluk and Jacobs, 1998; McCauley, 1986; Seibert, 1997). Thus, we recommend the conceptual and applied benefits of using CQ as a selection tool to identify those best able to translate and transform their international experiences into effectiveness.

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