Does being culturally intelligent make you a transformational and adaptable leader?

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Does being culturally intelligent make you a transformational and adaptable leader?

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships between cultural intelligence (CQ) and both leadership style (MLQ), and leadership adaptability (LA), seeking to understand whether leaders with higher CQ will more frequently practice an adaptive and transformational leadership.

Design/methodology/approach

Respondents are 167 leaders of public and private schools in the UAE; they completed a questionnaire that incorporated the 20-item version of the CQ scale, the 36-item MLQ5x scale, and the 13-item LA scale. Correlation and regression analyses assess the relationships between the concepts.

Findings

CQ has a significant relationship with the transformational component of MLQ; the strategy, motivation and behaviour components of CQ are significantly related to transformational leadership. CQ is not related to transactional or laissez-faire leadership style. CQ has a significant relationship with LA; the strategy, motivation and behaviour components of CQ are significant predictors of LA.

Originality

This is the first study to bring together these three concepts, and to understand the relationships between them.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Leadership Style, Leadership Adaptability, UAE.
1 Introduction

Globalisation is a complex issue with social, political, and economic implications that reach beyond individual countries and societies. It has prompted the need for leaders to possess a variety of experiences and skills to allow them to work effectively in increasingly culturally diverse settings (Ng et al., 2012); resultantly, there is a strong demand for leaders who have the necessary skills required to lead culturally diversified teams (Groves & Feyerherm, 2011; Van Dyne et al., 2010).

To assess a leaders’ competence and skills in diverse settings, researchers have developed the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ), a construct that is motivated by the practicality of globalisation in the workplace and can be described as an individual’s capacity to operate and manage in multicultural environments (Ang and Van Dyne, 2015). Leaders who are culturally intelligent will exhibit a range of behaviours that allow them to adjust to a multi-cultural environment (Ibid.; Presbitero and Toledano, 2018; Henderson et al., 2018). Gelfand et al., (2008, p. 497) found CQ to be an “important individual characteristic that facilitates cultural adaptation and performance” in the workplace. Similarly, Leung et al. (2014, p. 495) identified the value of CQ in the workplace as having “provided the most promising evidence to predict a range of psychological, behavioural, and performance outcomes”.

CQ was introduced in 2003 and is based on a multidimensional framework of intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003) building on the idea of ‘multiple intelligences’ developed by Gardner (1983). It is defined as “an individual’s capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings....a multidimensional construct targeted at situations involving cross cultural interactions arising from differences in race, ethnicity and nationality” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 101). CQ has also been defined as “a capability, which increases the manager’s ability to effectively interact with people belonging to other cultures” (Jyoti and Kour, 2017, p. 306).

1.1 Purpose of the study

Being culturally intelligent may make for effective cultural interactions, but does it make an effective leader? What does possessing a high level of cultural intelligence mean for other aspects of a leader’s leadership? Researchers investigating the area of cultural intelligence have identified the issue of leadership style and adaptability and the influence of cultural intelligence on successful leadership processes within organisations. For example, Livermore (2010) and Mannor (2008) both argued that CQ increases leaders’ abilities to assess culturally diverse work settings, thereby enabling them to adapt their leadership style accordingly. Livermore (2010, p. 41) goes further to state that leaders with advanced capabilities in CQ “greatly contribute to leadership effectiveness and performance outcomes’ in culturally diverse teams”. Thomas (2006, p. 81) states that “CQ will interact with leadership, allowing the leader to understand the differences between the host culture values and his
or her own beliefs thereby strengthening positive relationship between leadership and cultural adaptation”. Further, Vogelgesang et al. (2009) argued that cultural intelligence coupled with leadership creates an interaction, whereby increasing levels of cultural intelligence will strengthen the relationship between leadership and cultural adaptation.

The intention of this study is to further investigate the relationships between cultural intelligence and two other aspects of leadership; leadership style and leadership adaptability. Although other studies have highlighted these as being inter-related, there is little evidence of them being brought together in a single study, and the strength or absence of the relationships between the concepts are not well understood. This study therefore brings them together in an assessment of school leadership in the culturally diverse UAE.

1.2 Development and use of a CQ scale

Ang et al. (2007) developed the first instrument to measure cultural intelligence, “The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)”. This scale was developed to facilitate the validation of Earley and Ang’s (2003) conceptualisation of CQ. The CQS, “measures the multi-faceted characteristic of individuals’ cultural intelligence by assessing their intelligence through meta-cognitive, cognitive, behavioural, and motivational facets” (Ang et al., 2007, p. 362). The instrument has been through an extensive validation process, and research has demonstrated that it is generalisable (Van Dyne et al., 2012). The CQS consists of twenty questions, each of which measures one of the four CQ factors.

Research to date using CQS has been both strong and encouraging (Kang et al., 2019; Townsend et al., 2015; Collins et al., 2016, Schlaegel & Sarstedt, 2016). A recent meta-analysis (Rockstuhl and Van Dyne, 2018) highlighted the predictive power of CQ and demonstrated the incremental validity and the value of the four factors, above and beyond latent CQ. A number of empirical studies have examined CQ in both international and intercultural settings. They have found that CQ can be used to an individual’s benefit when working in international and intercultural contexts. For example, Mor et al. (2013) found CQ encouraged intercultural cooperation, and Groves et al. (2015) and Imai and Gelfund (2010) found it supported intercultural negotiations. A recent study has validated the CQ scale in the UAE (Al Dhaheri, 2021).

1.3 Understanding leadership styles using the MLQ5x

Transformational and Transactional Theory was formalized first by Downtown (1973) and then by Burns (1978) who was credited as the leading proponent. According to Burns (1978, p. 4), “the transforming leader recognises and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower…, identifies potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and fully engages the follower”. Both Downtown and Burns suggested that transformational leaders gauge the abilities of all of their
followers to be able to complete their current commitments, whilst also planning for their future responsibilities.

Transformational leaders differed from transactional leaders in that transactional leaders exchanged results for rewards, whereas transformational leaders sought to change the existing status for something perceived as better, asking their subordinates to rise above their own self-interests for the common good of the organisation (Bass, 1985). Nazarian et al. (2017, p. 1082) claimed that “transformational leadership is expected to have a greater impact on organisational performance when compared to other leadership styles”, and a number of studies have shown better outcomes resulting from transformational over transactional styles of leadership (Avolio and Bass, 2004; Dvir et al, 2002; Erkutlu, 2008; Northouse, 2007; Waldman et al, 2001).

The Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM) (Avolio, 1999; Avolio and Bass, 2002; Yukl, 1999) comprises laissez-faire, transactional and transformational leadership styles, using the well-established Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to measure leadership profile. The MLQ has three scales; Transformational leadership which has four dimensions; ‘idealized influence (attribute and behaviour)’, ‘ inspirational motivation’, ‘intellectual stimulation’, and ‘individualized consideration’. Transactional leadership consists of two dimensions: ‘contingent reward’, and ‘management-by-exception - active’. Laissez-faire leadership consists two dimensions; ‘management-by-exception - passive’ and ‘laissez-faire’.

1.4 Understanding leadership adaptability

Adaptive leadership can be summarised as appropriately altering behaviour as the situation changes. This has been expressed in a wide variety of ways, but all aim to describe leaders who are capable of accurately understanding a particular situation and modifying their behaviour accordingly (Kaiser et al., 2007; Pulakos et al., 2000).

Adaptive leadership has been termed a “theory of practice” and was pioneered by Ronald Heifetz in Leadership Without Easy Answers (1994). At its most fundamental level, the approach developed seeks to distinguish technical problems from adaptive challenges, consequently producing distinct qualities of an adaptive challenge. Heifetz’s theory is based upon people experiencing a sense of loss or reduced effectiveness as a result of change.

A leader’s level of adaptability is related to their capacity to adjust their thoughts and behaviours in order to develop responses to changing decision-making situations (Luu, 2017). Linsky and Lawrence (2011) described adaptive leadership as an approach to leadership that demonstrates some distinct qualities and differences in its underlying focus, including:
The concept of leadership revolves around understanding, behaviours and actions. It can, therefore, be learned, and is not an innate trait.

An organisation’s ability to adapt rests on it possessing widespread leadership that can emanate from anywhere within an organisation – not simply from those at the top.

There is an inherent danger and difficulty to leading through adaptive change, as change typically generates resistance. As a consequence, adaptive leadership relies on understanding adaptive pressures and dynamics, and then applying those insights to greater success in leading through the change.

A scale to measure leadership adaptability has recently been developed (Aldhaheri, 2020) and resulted from the same study that is presented in this paper. The scale has 13-items that in combination as a single dimension measure the concept of leadership adaptability.

1.5 Research context

Cultural diversity is very much reflected in the make-up of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) education system and its schools; both staff and pupils alike represent numerous countries and cultures from across the world. The UAE is a constitutional federation of seven emirates, with a population of ~10 million. Almost 90% of the population are classified as expatriates, with over 200 nationalities represented. This cultural diversity is in part due to its colonial history, but also its geographical position in Western Asia, making it close to both Africa and Europe, and in close proximity to busy worldwide shipping and trade routes.
2 Method

The questionnaire for the survey comprised four parts. The first part covered the 20 CQ questions; the 36 questions covering leadership style using the MLQ5X scale formed the second part; the third part covered 13 questions regarding leadership adaptability; and the final part asked 13 socio-demographic questions.

A Likert response scale was used for the 20 CQ scale variables, as suggested and used in the article by Ang, Van Dyne & Koh (2006), with responses on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), centred on 4 (neither agree, nor disagree). The same response scale was used for the 13 leadership adaptability questions. For the MLQ5x, respondents reported the frequency with which they practised leadership styles that were described by short statements, on a five-point scale of 0 to 4, with 0 representing ‘not at all’ and 4 representing ‘frequently, if not always’.

The researcher obtained contact details of school leaders from the local regulatory body, the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK). The list included all 443 schools in Abu Dhabi, 257 of which were public schools and 186 of which were private schools (N=443). In November 2015, an online questionnaire was emailed to every school leader (i.e., whole population study). To allay any fears pertaining to confidentiality, the questionnaires were accompanied with an email covering contextual information and offering an explanation of the aims of the study. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a letter of endorsement from ADEK. Respondents provided their informed consent through their participation.

A record was kept by the researcher in order to monitor receipt of responses and to identify non-respondents. Reminder emails were sent to non-respondents. No incentives were offered to encourage participation with respondents free to choose to respond. No additional methods were used to contact non-respondents. In all, 167 responses were received (n=167), resulting in a response rate of 37.7% (167/443). The demographic characteristics of the participants can be found in Aldhaheri (2019).
3 Results

Basic descriptive statistics against each of the constructs in the questionnaire are shown in Table 1. The first four rows show results for the CQ constructs; mean scores are high, with three of the four values almost six (max seven), indicating strong agreement with the CQ statements. The following nine rows, shaded grey, show the results for the nine constructs from the MLQ5X leadership style questionnaire. The first five show leaders frequently practicing transformational leadership, with mean scores above three (max 4). For transactional leadership, the picture is mixed; contingent reward is above three, but active management by exception is closer to two. Leaders rarely practiced the laissez-faire leadership style; both mean scores are below one. Finally, leaders strongly agreed with statements pertaining to their leadership adaptability qualities, with a mean score just under six (max 7).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for each of the constructs in the questionnaire

The following sections seek to assess the relationships between the constructs; firstly, between cultural intelligence and leadership style, and then between cultural intelligence and leadership adaptability.

3.1 Is cultural intelligence related to leadership style and leadership adaptability?

The analysis uses participants’ mean scores for the CQ, MLQ and leadership adaptability scales and seeks to understand correlations between them. Correlations are used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the characteristics; does having higher cultural intelligence increase the likeliness of practicing transformational leadership style or higher leadership adaptability? Does having lower cultural intelligence correlate with leaders being more likely to practice a laissez-faire leadership style or lower leadership adaptability?

The Pearson correlation coefficient is used to understand the relationship between several sets of correlations. Reported are both the correlation coefficients and the significance of the correlations. A 5% significance level is chosen, and a Bonferroni correction is applied, to limit the possibility of false positives. Table 2 shows the results of the Pearson correlations.

Table 2: Pearson correlation coefficient between cultural intelligence and leadership style, and cultural intelligence and leadership adaptability (* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001).

The correlation coefficient between all 20 CQ variables and the transformational dimension of the MLQ scale was found to be 0.250, significant at the 1% level (p<.01). Significant relationships were not found between mean CQ and transformational or laissez-faire leadership styles. When CQ was broken down into four constructs, a number of the correlations were found to be significant, all of which relate to the transformational leadership style. Firstly, with the ‘strategy’ element of cultural
intelligence \( (r = 0.224; p = .01) \), secondly with the ‘motivation’ component of cultural intelligence \( (r = 0.225; p < .01) \), and finally the ‘behaviour’ component of cultural intelligence \( (r = 0.286; p < .01) \).

The correlation coefficient between the mean of all 20 CQ variables and the leadership adaptability scale was found to be 0.501, significant at the 0.1% level \( (p < .001) \). Further, each of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence were also found to be significant at the 0.1% level \( (p < .001) \), with positive values of \( r \) ranging from 0.247 to 0.567, indicating strong positive relationships between each of the four dimensions of CQ and leadership adaptability.

3.2 Can leadership adaptability be predicted by cultural intelligence?

Correlation analyses identified a strong relationship between cultural intelligence and leadership adaptability; to understand this relationship further, the concepts are used in a regression analysis. A path diagram for this model is shown in Error! Reference source not found., with each of the four CQ constructs predicting leadership adaptability. The hypothesis behind this choice is that culturally intelligent leaders will adapt their leadership accordingly when they find themselves in culturally diverse settings. Reversing this relationship - so that leadership adaptability is a predictor of cultural intelligence - conceptually makes less sense. Being an adaptable leader would not result in the leader being culturally intelligent.

Figure 1: Path diagram showing the proposed relationship between leadership adaptability and cultural intelligence

The model is first tested for multi-collinearity; values above .9 indicate that two constructs are too highly correlated and are multi-collinear. All of the values are below .9 (range: 0.265-0.665), indicating that multi-collinearity is not an issue.

Table 3 shows the results for the regression model, indicating how good the regression model is – i.e. how good the four predictors (CQ constructs) are at predicting the outcome (leadership adaptability). The value of ‘R’ (0.743), indicates a good (Field, 2013) correlation between the four predictors and the outcome. ‘R2’ indicates that of the total variance in leadership adaptability, 55.2% is predicted by understanding the four cultural intelligence constructs (Adj. R2). Although there are not commonly applied cut-offs for evaluating scores of R2, these scores indicate that cultural intelligence is a good predictor, accounting for more than half of the variance in leadership adaptability. The change statistics score is significant \( (F_{\text{change}} = 48.906; p = .01) \), indicating that the relationship between CQ and leadership adaptability is significant at the 1% level. The Durbin-Watson score, assessing the correlation of residuals, is 1.739 (scores close to 2 are deemed ‘good’).
Table 3: Regression model results

The results from the regression model identified a significant relationship between leadership adaptability and cultural intelligence, with strong values for the proportion of variance explained. Using an ANOVA test will identify the individual contributions of each of the four cultural intelligence dimensions.

The first result of ANOVA assesses whether the model is significantly better at predicting the value of the outcome variable than using the mean would be. The score for F specifically identifies the ratio of the improvement from the model to the inaccuracy still existing in the model (Table 4). The score for F (48.906) is considered to be significant (\(p < .001\)). The significant result for the ANOVA test allows for further testing to understand the contribution of each predictor.

Table 5 shows the results of the post-hoc tests.

Table 4: ANOVA test results for understanding the relationship between leadership adaptability and cultural intelligence

Table 5: Post-hoc tests to understand the individual contributions of predictor variables

The first column shows the value of B, the relationship between the predictor and the outcome. Values close to 1 indicate a very strong and positive relationship, scores close to -1 indicate a strong but negative relationship, scores close to zero indicate no relationship. For CQ strategy, motivation and behaviour, values of B are positive, indicating that as an individuals’ leadership adaptability increases, their score for strategy, motivation and behaviour increases proportionately. For knowledge however, the score is negative, but is very small, and almost zero therefore indicating no relationship. The standard error for each B value indicates to what extent the values might vary across samples. Each predictor has a small standard error. The values of B are also standardised.

Each value of B can be tested to assess whether it is significantly different from zero, using a \(t\)-test to produce a \(t\) value and associated probability. A significant value of \(t\) indicates that the value of B is having a significant impact on the outcome variable. For three of the predictors (strategy, motivation and behaviour) there is significant values of \(t\) (\(p < .01\)), whereas for knowledge the value is non-significant (\(p > .05\)). The post-hoc tests therefore have identified that strategy, motivation and behaviour each has a significant effect on leadership adaptability. Tests of multi-collinearity for the ANOVA model suggested there are no collinearity issues.
4 Discussion

4.1 Theoretical contributions

This study has sought to understand the relationships between constructs that are each used to understand a different theoretical aspect of the effectiveness of leaders; cultural intelligence, leadership style, and leadership adaptability. Both cultural intelligence and leadership style are frequently studied, but rarely together. The quantitative study of leadership adaptability has only recently been made possible by the development of a quantitative scale (see Aldhaheri, 2020); its relationships with other leadership constructs, such as CQ, was therefore unknown.

4.1.1 Cultural intelligence and leadership style

The analysis presented sought to understand whether there are relationships between participants’ level of cultural intelligence and their leadership style. The analysis found that the CQ scale had a significant correlational relationship with the transformational leadership style, and a further set of comparisons found that the strategy, motivation, and behaviour components of cultural intelligence were significantly correlated with transformational leadership.

However, none of the correlations involving transactional leadership style or laissez-faire leadership style were found to be correlated with cultural intelligence. Also, the correlations involving the knowledge component of cultural intelligence was found not to be significantly related to any of the three leadership styles.

Because of the mixed results, further analysis of the relationship between cultural intelligence and leadership style was not carried out. Future studies may wish to replicate the approach taken in this study, in order to test again for relationships not found in this study; or simply to understand deeper the relationship between the strategy, motivation, and behaviour components of leadership adaptability with the transformation leadership style.

The result is somewhat in line with other studies that have linked transformational leadership style with high levels of CQ. For example, Keung and Rockinson-Szarkiw (2013, p. 836) focused on international school leaders, and findings revealed a “significant positive relationship between cultural intelligence and transformational leadership”. It was also documented by the authors that “leaders who have high levels of cultural intelligence also exhibit high levels of transformational leadership style” (Keung and Rockinson-Szarkiw, 2013; p. 841). The study by Keung and Rockinson-Szarkiw (2013) found significant relationships between each of the four components of cultural intelligence and transformational leadership; however, the study did not investigate the relationships between CQ and transactional or laissez-faire styles of leadership.
This study therefore adds further evidence to the existing understanding of the relationship between cultural intelligence and leadership styles; the evidence is collected in a new geographical setting where it has not been established previously.

4.1.2 Cultural intelligence and leadership adaptability

The analysis presented sought to understand whether there are relationships between participants’ level of cultural intelligence and their leadership adaptability. The analysis found that the CQ scale had a significant correlational relationship with leadership adaptability, and a further set of comparisons found that each of the four constructs of cultural intelligence - strategy, knowledge, motivation, behaviour – were each significantly correlated with leadership adaptability. Because of these positive results, further analyses were carried out, and the four dimensions of cultural intelligence were found to be good predictors of leadership adaptability in a regression analysis, with an adjusted $R^2$ value of 0.54. A post-hoc ANOVA test revealed that three of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence (strategy, motivation, behaviour) were significant predictors of leadership adaptability at the 1% level, with only the knowledge construct not identified as being a significant predictor.

Whilst the positive results reported have indicated a strong relationship between cultural intelligence and leadership adaptability, caution must be applied. This is the first use of the newly developed leadership adaptability scale in conjunction with the cultural intelligence scale, and as such comparisons to previous studies cannot be made. Future studies should seek to replicate the approach taken here to further test the relationship. Future studies may also wish to replicate the study in other locations, and with other types of leaders. The cultural diversity of the UAE may be a factor in the findings, and future studies carried out in less culturally diverse settings may find different results.

4.2 Practical considerations

Whilst the study predominantly sought to identify the relationships between leadership constructs and therefore make theoretical contributions, practical considerations for the education sector in the UAE can be posited. The results are positive for the sector; culturally intelligent school leaders, that adapt their leadership and lead in a transformational style is an encouraging finding. This can be built upon by the educational authorities in the UAE, a baseline that can be measured against, that informs future training and development programmes and recruitment to the sector.
5 References


Figures

Figure 1: Path diagram showing the proposed relationship between leadership adaptability and cultural intelligence
### Tables

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics for each of the constructs in the questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<td>5.97</td>
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**Table 2: Pearson correlation coefficient between cultural intelligence, leadership style and leadership adaptability (* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001).**

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<th></th>
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<td>Leadership Adaptability</td>
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<td>0.567***</td>
<td>0.247***</td>
<td>0.381***</td>
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Table 3: Regression model results

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
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<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
<th>R² Change</th>
<th>F Change</th>
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<tr>
<td>mean</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>159</td>
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Table 4: ANOVA test results for understanding the relationship between leadership adaptability and cultural intelligence

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Table 5: Post-hoc tests to understand the individual contributions of predictor variables

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<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for B</th>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
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<td>Lower Bound</td>
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<td>CQ - Behaviour</td>
<td>0.276</td>
<td>0.053</td>
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<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>0.171</td>
</tr>
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