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The role of cultural intelligence in facilitating the internationalization process of companies in light of cultural diversity

دور الذكاء الثقافي في تسهيل عملية تدويل الشركات في ظل التعددية الثقافية

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Abstract:

In the midst of intense competition in today's global markets, it is no longer sufficient for companies to merely offer high-quality products or technically superior services. There is now an urgent need to possess the ability to communicate effectively with culturally diverse audiences, and here emerges the role of cultural intelligence as a critical competitive advantage for success in international markets.

This article explores the concept of cultural intelligence and its pivotal role in driving companies' success on an international level, highlighting its importance in enhancing meaningful communications, mitigating risks, and unlocking growth opportunities in a culturally diverse world.

Keywords: Internationalization, cultural intelligence, corporations, international markets, cultural diversity.

ملخص:

في خضم التنافس الشديد في الأسواق العالمية اليوم، لم يعد كافياً للشركات أن تقدم منتجات عالية الجودة أو خدمات متفوقة من الناحية الفنية فحسب، بل باتت الحاجة ملحة لامتلاك القدرة على التواصل بفعالية مع جماهير متنوعة ثقافياً، وهنا يبرز دور الذكاء الثقافي كميزة تنافسية حاسمة للنجاح في الأسواق الدولية.

يستكشف هذا المقال مفهوم الذكاء الثقافي ودوره المحوري في دفع نجاح الشركات على المستوى الدولي، مع تسليط الضوء على أهميته في تعزيز الاتصالات الهادفة، تخفيف المخاطر، وفتح فرص النمو في عالم متنوع ثقافياً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدويل، ذكاء ثقافي، شركات، أسواق دولية، تنوع ثقافي.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, companies and institutions need managers and leaders with cultural intelligence to survive. Globalization has led to increased interaction between cultures and created the need for knowledge and competence about different cultures, resulting in an unprecedented growth in cultural intelligence research¹.

Cultural intelligence refers to the ability to adapt and interact effectively in culturally diverse environments, going beyond mere awareness of cultural differences to include a deeper understanding of cultural norms, values, and behaviors, along with the ability to regulate one's actions and communication style accordingly. Individuals with high cultural intelligence possess the skills necessary to navigate different cultural complexities, demonstrating empathy, respect, and openness towards diverse perspectives².

Cultural intelligence has become an important aspect of global business, serving as an essential skill for working across borders, offering a range of advantages to companies that adopt it³. The boundaries of countries and cultures no longer pose a barrier to the flow of capital, goods, and services, as companies now view the entire world as a single market to be exploited and expanded into. However, this global expansion does not come without challenges. Companies face several challenges resulting from cultural differences that affect their interactions with customers, partners, and employees alike. By understanding and adapting to the subtle

cultural differences between different regions, companies can enhance communication, tailor their offerings to local preferences, build trust and relationships, overcome organizational challenges, and foster innovation.

Investing in cultural intelligence is not just a strategic necessity, but also a key driver for achieving competitive advantage in today's globalized economy. As companies continue to expand their global presence, those with high cultural intelligence will be better positioned to succeed in diverse international markets.

Based on the foregoing, we can pose the following problematic:

How does cultural intelligence contribute to the success of business internationalization for companies in light of the challenges and opportunities imposed by globalization and cultural diversity in global markets?

This problematic has been detailed into the following sub-questions:

- What is cultural intelligence?
- What are the main cultural challenges faced by companies when expanding internationally?
- How does cultural intelligence help companies overcome these challenges?
- How is cultural intelligence developed in companies?

To answer the problematic and the questions posed, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

First Hypothesis: A high level of cultural intelligence among leaders and employees leads to improved ability to adapt to different cultural environments in international markets.

Second Hypothesis: Companies that integrate cultural intelligence into their international marketing strategies achieve better results in attracting and retaining customers in foreign markets.

Third Hypothesis: A high level of cultural intelligence leads to reduced misunderstandings and cultural conflicts within multinational teams in international companies.

Importance of the Study:

The importance of this study lies in understanding the role of cultural intelligence in driving the success of companies in international markets by improving their ability to navigate diverse cultural environments effectively. Additionally, this study can help companies address common challenges such as communication barriers, adaptation difficulties, and cross-cultural misunderstandings, ultimately leading to improved performance, enhanced reputation, and growth in global markets. By promoting cultural intelligence within the corporate workforce, companies can enhance diversity, inclusion, and mutual understanding, contributing to a more harmonious and interconnected global business environment.

Objectives of the Study:

The aim of this research is to examine how cultural intelligence contributes to the success of companies operating in international markets. Specifically, the study aims to explore how cultural intelligence

affects various aspects of business operations, including communication, adaptation, collaboration, risk management, trust-building, and legal compliance. It also addresses the main challenges faced by companies in multicultural environments.

Research Methodology:

To answer the problematic, a descriptive analytical approach was used to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the role of cultural intelligence in the process of company internationalization, focusing on its importance in achieving success in culturally diverse international markets.

2. Cultural Intelligence:

Culture encompasses everything related to our way of life. It is composed of factors including language, society, economy, customs, history, and religion. Culture generally shapes people's behaviors, backgrounds, values, and beliefs. Intelligence, on the other hand, refers to the ability to respond flexibly to new situations, to learn, and to innovate - its definition depends on culture. There are individual differences in human intelligence that can be attributed to cultural background. Cultural differences also determine an individual's intelligence; what is considered "smart" in one society may be considered "foolish" in another⁴.

Cultural complexities can be so subtle that encountering differences in values, attitudes, and behaviors can lead to culture shock, causing psychological confusion and reinforcing negative feelings resulting from misunderstanding. In today's global environment, recognizing and respecting cultural differences is crucial. As the global

economy becomes increasingly complex, interventions aimed at promoting cultural convergence have become increasingly justified⁵.

Since 2003, a large body of research on cultural intelligence has emerged to enhance our understanding of "how to work effectively in situations characterized by cultural differences"⁶. Ang & Earley were the first to focus on this concept, with their interest in this type of intelligence in the business field, and they published the first book on cultural intelligence in 2003. Since then, cultural intelligence has attracted research and studies worldwide.

The origins of cultural intelligence stem partly from international experience and cultural exposure, where Earley initially defined cultural intelligence as a useful ability for multicultural teams and international tasks. In 2007, the reliable and validated four-factor Cultural Intelligence Scale was published, consisting of 20 items with its four dimensions, and has been adopted in numerous studies⁷.

2.1. The Concept of Cultural Intelligence:

Cultural Intelligence (also known as Cultural Quotient or CQ) refers to an individual's ability to function effectively in a culturally diverse environment, that is, the ability to understand unfamiliar contexts and then integrate into them⁸.

Ang & Earley define it as "an individual's capability to blend practically in culturally diverse places." They also pointed out the importance of forming cultural intelligence factors and their effective and influential role in cultural intelligence across different cultural and social situations, and that these factors are interconnected in a

specific field. Therefore, the best definition of cultural intelligence is that it is a multidimensional construct with distinctive characteristics, where cognitive, motivational, and behavioral elements all participate in its single composition⁹.

According to (Crowne, 2009)¹⁰, cultural intelligence is the skill that enables an individual to communicate effectively across other cultures.

Based on the above, cultural intelligence can be defined as: **The ability to function effectively across different cultural contexts, going beyond mere awareness of cultural differences to include the skills and attitudes necessary for interacting and collaborating with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.**

Cultural intelligence is positively associated with risk management in cross-border environments where it reduces the degree of uncertainty, thus increasing the accuracy of risk assessment in international business ventures¹¹.

To study the impact of cultural intelligence in multicultural environments, (Ott & Michailova, 2016)¹² pointed to three main axes: adjustment and adaptation, performance and effectiveness, and cross-cultural leadership. With the expanding scope of business globalization, other concepts describing cross-cultural interactions have emerged, such as "cultural competence," which is considered a pivotal factor for successfully managing cross-cultural encounters.

Most researchers view cultural competence as similar to cultural intelligence in the ability to work effectively

within diverse cultural environments. "Global mindset" is another concept with a long research history in international business and management, referring to the ability to work effectively in environments characterized by a high degree of cultural and commercial complexity. Although these concepts do not exactly match cultural intelligence, they are closely related to the field of cultural intelligence research for two reasons: First, there is significant overlap and interconnection between them and the concept of cultural intelligence. Second, they are used for the same purpose in the context of international business and management. Nevertheless, scientists have almost reached the same conclusion that in the field of international business, cultural intelligence is more appropriate at the personal level of individuals, while the global mindset focuses more on the strategic level and general orientations of organizations¹³.

2.2. Dimensions of Cultural Intelligence:

Ang & Earley conceptualized the dimensions of cultural intelligence which include: knowledge, metacognition, motivation, and behavioral dimension. This four-dimensional structure has been widely adopted, although some previous research has combined metacognitive and cognitive aspects into one dimension.

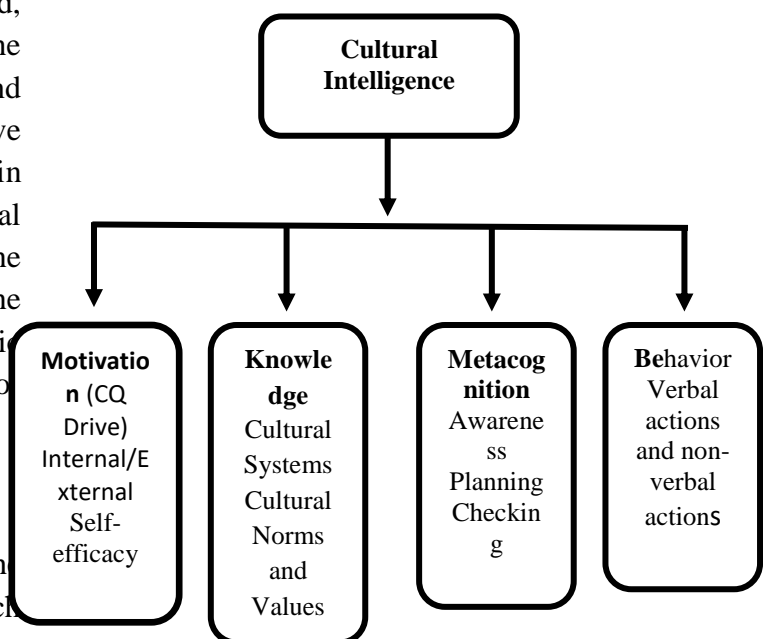
The four dimensions of cultural intelligence can be conceived in two parts¹⁴:

Internal Aspects of Cultural Intelligence: This is represented by the two dimensions (metacognitive and cognitive) which are more related to knowledge content and innate cognitive abilities than external aspects.

External Aspects of Cultural Intelligence: These are associated with the motivational and behavioral dimensions, i.e., they have a direct connection to how individuals adapt to their environment, as both predict individuals' ability to adjust and adapt in a multicultural encounter.

These four elements are illustrated in the following figure:

Figure (1): The Four Elements of Cultural Intelligence



Source: (Matthew & Sarhan, 2021, p. 124)

-Cognitive CQ: This dimension is related to the knowledge of norms, practices, and traditions in different cultures, which an individual acquires through educational and personal experiences¹⁵. It also refers to the extent to which a person understands the similarities and differences between cultures and their reflection on the general cognitive structure and mental maps of different cultures. This includes general knowledge about economic and legal systems, norms and traditions, the nature of social

interactions, religious beliefs, traditional crafts, and the language of that different culture¹⁶.

-Metacognitive CQ: This dimension refers to the processes that an individual uses to acquire understanding and knowledge of other cultures, and the ability to interpret cultural interaction experiences in different cultural contexts. It measures an individual's ability to plan ahead during and after cultural engagement. It consists of three sub-dimensions: planning, awareness, and checking. Planning involves taking appropriate time to face cultural interactions and being sufficiently deliberate in consciously observing what is on one's mind as well as the minds of others. Awareness involves being in harmony with what is on one's mind and others' minds during the cultural encounter process. Checking involves comparing one's actual experiences with prior expectations and adjusting cognitive schemas accordingly¹⁷.

-Motivational CQ: This dimension refers to an individual's interest and desire to interact with individuals from different cultures and to know the nature of other cultures. It measures the level of interest, motivation, and energy that an individual needs to adapt across cultures. It consists of three sub-dimensions: intrinsic interest, which involves the enjoyment that arises from culturally diverse situations; extrinsic interest, which involves the tangible benefits an individual gains from culturally diverse experiences; and self-efficacy, which involves an individual's confidence in their abilities¹⁸.

-Behavioral CQ: This dimension refers to an individual's ability to communicate with cultural awareness when dealing with individuals from different

cultures. It represents the ability to act, speak, and use gestures and facial expressions appropriate in a particular culture (Zhao & Zhou, 2015, p. 165). It also means an individual's ability to adapt verbal and non-verbal behaviors appropriately when dealing with different cultures¹⁹.

3.Cultural Challenges in the Internationalization of Companies

3.1. Definition of internationalization:

Internationalization is defined as the process through which companies expand their commercial activities and operations beyond their home country's borders to include international markets. This process involves a set of strategies and practices aimed at increasing the company's participation in global markets and adapting its products, services, and operations to meet the needs and expectations of customers in different cultural and economic environments.

There are several objectives reflecting the various motivations behind companies' decisions to expand internationally, including:

- Increasing sales and profits by targeting multiple international markets.

- Diversifying risks by distributing activities across different geographical areas.

- Benefiting from economies of scale and improving operational efficiency.

- Enhancing competitiveness by acquiring new resources and expertise from international markets and improving product and service quality to meet international standards.

- Leveraging technological advancements

and innovations in advanced markets and participating in global research and development networks.

3.2. Cultural Challenges Facing Companies in Their International Expansion:

When entering international markets, companies face numerous challenges associated with cultural differences, which require a deep understanding and respect for the target cultures, as well as intelligent adaptation of marketing strategies and operations to align with these differences. Some of the most notable challenges include:

-Language and Translation Challenges:

Language is one of the biggest barriers when entering new markets. Accurate translation of marketing content, advertising materials, websites, and other materials is crucial for brand success. However, literal translation often fails to convey the cultural meanings and nuances of each language. Therefore, companies must employ professional translators who are knowledgeable about the target cultures to ensure comprehensive translations that consider cultural contexts.

-Differences in Customs, Traditions, and Beliefs:

Cultures vary in their core values, ways of thinking, beliefs, and customs. What is acceptable in one culture may be unacceptable in another. This necessitates companies to respect these customs and beliefs when designing their products and marketing campaigns, and to be cautious of using symbols, colors, or shapes that may have negative connotations in some cultures.

-Differences in Tastes and Preferences:

Consumer tastes and preferences vary between cultures, and even within the same culture. Therefore, companies cannot

assume that what works in one market will necessarily succeed in another. Companies must conduct thorough market research to understand the needs and preferences of local consumers and adapt their products and services accordingly.

-Legal Challenges and Local Regulations:

Commercial and economic laws and regulations differ between countries and cultures, posing an additional challenge for international companies. Thus, obtaining specialized legal advice is necessary to ensure the company complies with local laws and regulations in each market it enters.

-Economic and Political Environment:

The economic conditions and political situations prevailing in target countries play a crucial role in the success or failure of international companies. Fluctuations in exchange rates, changes in tax policies, and customs duties directly impact profit margins and cost items. Additionally, political instability and security disturbances can pose risks to the continuity of business operations. Therefore, companies must closely monitor economic events and political developments in target markets and prepare alternative plans to deal with potential fluctuations or crises.

4. The Role of Cultural Intelligence in Driving the Success of Companies in International Markets:

Digitization and global mobility allow organizations to operate on a global scale and employ a diverse workforce. With globalization comes the challenge of navigating diverse cultural environments, where understanding and adapting to local customs, values, and norms is essential for success. Here, cultural intelligence emerges

as a critical factor in determining the success or failure of companies operating on a global scale.

-Communication is essential in business, and it becomes even more important in global markets where language barriers and cultural differences abound. Cultural intelligence enables companies to navigate linguistic and cultural differences, ensuring that messages are conveyed accurately and respectfully to diverse audiences. Whether designing marketing campaigns or negotiating business deals, the skillful application of cultural intelligence enhances meaningful interactions and builds trust among stakeholders.

-Cultural intelligence facilitates adaptation and flexibility in responding to the needs and preferences of different cultural groups. What works in one market may not necessarily succeed in another, and failing to recognize these differences can lead to costly mistakes. Companies with high levels of cultural intelligence can quickly adjust their products, services, and business strategies to align with local customs and market requirements. By demonstrating sensitivity to cultural norms and values, companies can develop offerings that resonate with local consumers, leading to increased sales and market share, thus gaining a competitive edge in the global market²⁰.

-Cultural intelligence is essential for effective leadership and team management in multinational organizations, as it enhances effective collaboration and teamwork by fostering mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation of diverse perspectives. Leaders with high cultural intelligence are better equipped to lead diverse teams, promote cooperation, and

leverage cultural diversity for successful innovation. Cultural diversity spurs innovation due to the presence of multiple perspectives from multicultural teams. It also enhances the success of innovation by helping reconcile cultural differences and mitigating conflicts, thereby increasing the likelihood of reaching a synergistic cultural solution that embraces the ideas or interests of multiple parties²¹. Companies that prioritize cultural intelligence in their workforce development initiatives reap the benefits of a cohesive, high-performing team capable of tackling complex global challenges.

-Cultural intelligence serves as a crucial tool for risk management in international business operations. By anticipating and addressing potential cultural risks, companies can mitigate misunderstandings, avoid offending customers or stakeholders, and prevent costly mistakes that could damage their reputation or hinder business operations.

-Trust is the foundation of successful business relationships and is often built on mutual respect and understanding. Cultural intelligence plays a crucial role in building trust and credibility and fostering positive relationships with international partners and customers. Companies that show genuine respect for local customs and traditions are more likely to earn the trust and loyalty of consumers, demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion, which can enhance their reputation and credibility in global markets. By cultivating cultural sensitivity and empathy, companies can forge genuine connections with their target audience, overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers to establish meaningful and lasting relationships.

- Cultural intelligence plays a pivotal role in ensuring legal and ethical compliance in international business endeavors, as laws, regulations, and business practices vary significantly from country to country due to cultural, historical, and political factors. By understanding the cultural context in which they operate, companies can navigate the complex legal frameworks and ethical standards governing global trade, reducing the risk of legal disputes and regulatory violations. By adhering to ethical principles and respecting cultural norms, companies can maintain their integrity and reputation, earning the respect of stakeholders worldwide.

5. CONCLUSION

Geographical borders no longer hinder the flow of goods, services, and ideas across countries and cultures. Ambitious companies do not limit themselves to the local market but also seek to benefit from the opportunities presented by vast global markets. However, success in these multicultural markets requires more than just high-quality products or successful marketing campaigns. It demands a deep understanding of cultural diversity and sensitivity to differences in values, beliefs, and expectations among people. Here, cultural intelligence plays a crucial role in enabling companies to overcome cultural barriers and communicate more effectively with diverse audiences worldwide. Cultural intelligence is the ability to understand and appreciate different cultures and to adapt to varying practices and behaviors across national borders. Thanks to this skill, companies can build bridges of communication and trust with customers, partners, and employees from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, cultural intelligence has become an urgent necessity for survival and growth in the globalized and complex business environment. Ambitious companies must prioritize developing cultural intelligence if they wish to succeed in global markets and stand out among competitors .

Based on the discussions in this study regarding the importance of cultural intelligence in the success of companies in international markets, several recommendations can be made to enhance and benefit from cultural intelligence, including:

-Companies should invest in cultural training and awareness programs for employees at all levels to enhance their understanding of different cultures and how to interact with them appropriately.

-Diversifying the workforce by employing individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds helps integrate multiple perspectives and increases cultural sensitivity within the organization.

-Companies should conduct extensive studies of target markets and their cultures before entering them, to understand prevailing customs, values, and expectations and adapt strategies and products accordingly.

-It is essential for companies to ensure the presence of culturally aware leadership with the experience and competence to manage multicultural work environments. Leaders who are adept across cultural boundaries and possess cultural intelligence and sensitivity to differences are best equipped to guide and lead culturally diverse teams successfully and effectively.

-Companies should establish multinational teams to ensure the capture and integration of cultural diversity in product and service development processes, which enhances their ability to create solutions and offerings that align with the expectations and tastes of different target markets, thus increasing their chances of success in various markets.

-Companies should leverage technology and digital tools to overcome language and cultural barriers that hinder effective communication and coordination between their teams worldwide. Tools such as translation programs and video conferencing can facilitate seamless and efficient information and idea exchange among employees from diverse cultural backgrounds.

-Adopting management policies and practices flexible enough to adapt to cultural differences while maintaining operational efficiency and product and service quality, rather than attempting to impose uniform standards and work patterns based on a specific cultural model.

- Continuously monitoring cultural developments and trends in target markets and preparing to adapt to any potential changes in values and expectations.

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