Cultural intelligence refers to an individual’s capability to function effectively across cultures—this can include national, ethnic, and organizational as well as other types of culture. Rather than expecting individuals to master all the norms, values, and practices of the various cultures encountered, cultural intelligence helps leaders develop an overall perspective and repertoire that results in more effective leadership. The driving question behind the idea of cultural intelligence (or CQ) is this: Why do some leaders easily and effectively adapt their views and behaviors cross-culturally and others don’t? Your honest engagement with that question can determine whether or not you lead successfully in our rapidly globalizing world. In this article, we provide an overview of cultural intelligence and describe the Four-Factor Model of Cultural Intelligence (motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ) with the aim of helping you to think more deeply about your own cultural intelligence capabilities as well as helping you to apply these ideas and the CQ framework.

What is Cultural Intelligence (CQ)?

Most of us know that IQ or intelligence quotient is a measurement of one’s intellectual capabilities. In recent years, we’ve also seen the significance of EQ or emotional intelligence—one’s ability to lead and interact with effective emotional sensibilities. Cultural intelligence builds upon some of these same ideas, but instead focuses specifically on one’s capability to effectively understand and adapt to a myriad of cultural contexts as an additional and essential skill set needed by contemporary leaders.

Theories and books about cross-cultural interaction abound. A great deal of that material focuses on cultural knowledge—knowing how cultures differ in work norms, habits, and behaviors. The cultural intelligence approach goes beyond this emphasis on knowledge because it also emphasizes the importance of

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developing an overall repertoire of understanding, motivation, and skills that enables one to move in and out of lots of different cultural contexts. Cultural intelligence considers cultural, sociological, and individual dynamics that occur for each of us in cross-cultural settings.

Research demonstrates that effective cross-cultural leadership isn’t just a matter of emotional intelligence and common sense. Just as emotional intelligence focuses on a leader’s ability to work effectively with people by paying attention to the emotions of self and others, cultural intelligence focuses on a leader’s ability to function effectively with people and in situations involving different cultural backgrounds. When we interact with people from our own culture, we intuitively use a set of social cues to engage effectively. We have a wealth of information, most of which is subconscious, that helps us know how to relate and lead.

In contrast, when we experience a new culture, cues and information that have worked in the past are largely absent or misleading. For example, in culturally unfamiliar situations, it sometimes seems that other people’s behavior and perspectives are somewhat bizarre and random. Those with high CQ have the ability to encounter these types of confusing situations, think deeply about what is happening (or not happening), and make appropriate adjustments to how they understand, relate, and lead in the context of this different culture.

Making these kinds of adjustments involves a complex set of capabilities and processes that comes from intentional effort on the part of the leader, all of which contribute to the leader’s CQ. Cultural intelligence is a set of capabilities and skills that enables leaders from outside a culture to interpret unfamiliar behaviors and situations as though they were insiders to that culture. One of the most important things to assess when looking for culturally intelligent leaders is to see whether the person can identify behaviors that are universal to all humanity, behaviors that are cultural, and behaviors that are idiosyncratically personal to a particular individual in a specific situation.

The Four-Factor Model of Cultural Intelligence

The cultural intelligence model is rooted in a four-factor framework that synthesizes the volumes of material and perspectives on intelligence and cross-cultural leadership. CQ is composed of four qualitatively different capabilities, and yet, each of the four factors is interrelated. For real effectiveness, leaders need all four CQ capabilities, because focusing only on one factor of CQ may actually result in increased cultural ignorance rather than enhanced cultural intelligence. This is because CQ requires an overall repertoire of adaptive capabilities. The four factors of CQ are motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ. Each is described below.

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Motivational CQ: Showing Interest, Confidence, and Drive to Adapt Cross-Culturally

The motivational factor of CQ refers to the leader’s level of interest, drive, and energy to adapt cross-culturally. This refers to whether or not you have the confidence and drive to work through the challenges and conflict that often accompany cross-cultural work. The ability to be personally engaged and to
persevere through cross-cultural challenges is one of
the novel and most important aspects of the cultural
intelligence framework. Many of the other
approaches to thinking about cross-cultural
competencies simply assume that people are
motivated to gain cross-cultural capabilities. Yet
employees often approach diversity training
apathetically, and employees headed out on
international assignments are often more concerned
about moving their families overseas and getting
settled than they are about developing cultural
understanding. Without ample motivation, there’s
little point in spending time and money on training.

Motivational cultural intelligence includes
intrinsic motivation—the degree to which you derive
enjoyment from culturally diverse situations;
extrinsic motivation—the more tangible benefits
you gain from culturally diverse experiences; and
self-efficacy—your confidence that you will be
effective in a cross-cultural encounter. All three of
these motivational dynamics play a role in how
leaders approach cross-cultural situations. Stop and
examine your level of drive for doing cross-cultural
work. Your motivational CQ is strongly related to
your level of effectiveness in new cultural contexts.

Cognitive CQ: Understanding Cross-Cultural Issues and
Differences

Cognitive CQ is the knowledge dimension of cultural
intelligence. It refers to the leader’s level of
understanding about culture and culture’s role in
shaping the way to do business and interact with
others across cultural contexts. Your cognitive CQ or
knowledge is based on the degree to which you
understand the idea of culture and how it shapes the
way you think and behave. It also includes your
overall understanding of the ways that cultures vary
from one context to the next.

One of the most important parts of cognitive CQ
is an understanding of cultural systems and the set
of cultural norms and values associated with
different societies. Cultural systems are the ways
societies organize themselves to meet the basic
needs of humanity. For example, every nation has
cultural systems for (1) economic approaches for
producing vital commodities and distributing
products and services; (2) ways of codifying mating
and child-rearing practices that create marriage,
family, and other social structures; (3) educational
practices that enable learning and cultural
transmission; (4) political, legal, and social controls
that reduce anarchy and destruction (obedience to
social norms); (5) language conventions that
facilitate interaction; and (6) religious beliefs that
explain inexplicable phenomena.

Cultural norms and values are the varying ways
cultures approach things like time, authority, and
relationships. Although an understanding of how a
family system works might seem somewhat
theoretical, it becomes critically relevant when
you’re trying to develop human resource policies for
employees coming from a place where the cultural
norms dictate that employees will care for senior
members of their extended families. Likewise, the
value a culture places on time and relationships
becomes highly germane when an American is
trying to get a signed contract from a potential
affiliate in China or Brazil or Saudi Arabia or Spain,
where cultural values provide different norms for
what is considered appropriate in this type of
situation.

Metacognitive CQ: Strategizing and
Making Sense of Culturally Diverse Experiences

The metacognitive factor of CQ refers to the leader’s
ability to strategize when crossing cultures.
Metacognitive CQ, or strategy, involves slowing
down long enough to carefully observe what’s going
on inside our own and other people’s heads. It’s the
ability to think about our own thought processes
and draw on our cultural knowledge to understand a
different cultural context and solve problems in that
situation. It includes whether we can use our
cultural knowledge to plan an appropriate strategy,
accurately interpret what’s going on in a cross-
cultural situation, and check to see whether our
expectations are accurate or whether our mental
model of that particular person and/or culture
should be revised.

Seasoned leaders often jump into meetings with
little planning. This can work well in one’s home
culture. By drawing on emotional intelligence and
leadership experience, we can often get away with
"winging it" because we know how to respond to
cues and how to talk about our work. When
meetings involve individuals from different cultural
contexts, however, all the rules change. Relying on
our ability to intuitively respond to cues in these
more novel situations is dangerous. That’s where this third factor of cultural intelligence, metacognitive CQ, comes in.

Metacognitive CQ includes awareness, planning, and checking. Awareness means being in tune with what’s going on in one’s self and others. Planning is taking the time to prepare for a cross-cultural encounter—anticipating how to approach the people, topic, and situation. Checking is the monitoring we do as we engage in interactions to see whether the plans and expectations we had were appropriate. It’s comparing what we expected with our actual experience—with what happened. This factor of CQ reflects whether or not we can engage in awareness, planning, and checking in ways that result in better contemporary leadership practices. Metacognitive CQ emphasizes strategy and is the lynchpin between understanding cultural issues and actually being able to use that understanding to be more effective.

**Behavioral CQ: Changing Verbal and Nonverbal Actions Appropriately When Interacting Cross-Culturally**

Behavioral CQ, the *action* dimension of CQ, refers to the leader’s ability to act appropriately in a range of cross-cultural situations. It influences whether we can actually accomplish our performance goals effectively in light of different norms across cross-cultural situations. One of the most important aspects of behavioral CQ is knowing when to adapt to another culture and when not to do so. A person with high CQ learns which actions will and will not enhance effectiveness and acts on that understanding. Thus, behavioral CQ involves flexible actions tailored to the specific cultural context.

The behavioral factor of CQ includes the capability to be flexible in verbal and nonverbal actions. It also includes appropriate flexibility in speech acts—the exact words and phrases we use when we communicate specific types of messages. While the demands of today’s intercultural settings make it impossible to master all the do’s and don’ts of various cultures, there are certain behaviors that should be modified when we interact with different cultures. For example, Westerners need to learn the importance of carefully studying business cards presented by those from most Asian contexts. Also, some basic verbal and nonverbal behaviors enhance the extent to which we are seen as effective by others. As an example, the verbal tone (loud versus soft) in which words are spoken can convey different meanings across cultures. Although it is not necessary for an outsider to master the intricacies of bowing in Japan, appropriate use of touch is something to bear in mind. In sum, almost every approach to cross-cultural work has insisted on the importance of flexibility. With behavioral CQ, we now have a way of exploring how to enhance our flexibility.

**Four Steps Toward Enhancing Overall CQ**

Although the four factors of cultural intelligence don’t always develop in one particular order, it can be helpful to think about the four factors as four steps toward enhanced overall cultural intelligence.

1. **Step 1**: Motivational CQ (Drive) gives us the energy and self-confidence to pursue the needed cultural understanding and planning.
2. **Step 2**: Cognitive CQ (Knowledge) provides us with an understanding of basic cultural cues.
3. **Step 3**: Metacognitive CQ (Strategy) allows us to draw upon our cultural understanding so we can plan and interpret what’s going on in diverse contexts.
4. **Step 4**: Behavioral CQ (Action) provides us with the ability to engage in effective flexible leadership across cultures.
5. **Feedback Loop**: Others respond to our behavior; this influences our motivational CQ; and the cycle starts over—leading to further enhancement of overall cultural intelligence.

It is an exciting time to be involved in cross-cultural leadership! Almost every day each of us has the opportunity to learn from people who are different from us—people in various walks of life who are from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural intelligence offers us a pathway—a set of steps and capabilities for this journey—that should allow us to show respect and dignity for others while enhancing our own effectiveness in multicultural contexts.
We move in and out of socioethnic cultures, generational cultures, and organizational cultures in our daily lives. Numerous other cultural contexts exist in our lives as well, including cultures organized by professional careers, gender-oriented cultures, and cultures characterized by sexual preference and socioeconomic difference. One of the essentials for leadership in the twenty-first century is the ability to develop cultural intelligence, that is a person’s capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity—ethnic, religious, generational, and organizational to name only four.

As the world becomes more connected than ever, cross-cultural interactions are becoming the critical issue of our day. Cultural intelligence is needed by ministry leaders all across the United States. The flattened world is bringing us more and more encounters with people who aren’t like us. We cannot hope to become experts on every cultural context in which we find ourselves. But through cultural intelligence, we can enhance our ability to interact with one another in ways that are respectful, loving, and dignifying.

In his book Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World David Livermore illustrates the challenge of living in a culturally diverse world with this example of a youth leader in a congregation:

Let’s use a youth leader to think about the reasons a twenty-first century ministry leader needs cultural intelligence. In addition to serving youth from various ethnic backgrounds, a youth worker also deals with the generational divides between the youth, their parents, and the seniors in the church. On top of that, the youth pastor must learn the culture of the particular church and possibly the denomination of which it is a part. Who holds the power, how is conflict handled, and what are the sacred rituals? But then add to these differences the subcultures among the youth themselves, whether they be jocks, goths, rave enthusiasts, techies, or preppies. Increasingly youth base their cultural identity on issues such as sexual preference, social class, and musical genre. And then the youth leader must deal with the upcoming missions trip to Mexico. And the invitation to partner with an urban youth ministry nearby. And the overriding tension felt by youth pastors to engage students with the gospel while struggling to relate the church culture from which they operate to the all-pervasive popular culture and Internet-linked world in which students feel most at home. Get the picture? Cultural intelligence relates to the everyday realities of life in the twenty-first century. (Livermore, 30)

Think about the five to ten different cultural contexts you most regularly encounter. What ethnic cultures are represented in your church, community and work life? Where do you travel and who do you encounter? What organizational cultures do you engage week by week? What generational dynamics do you face among your family and friends, and in your church community?

David Livermore, in his books Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World and Leading with Cultural Intelligence, describes four dimensions of cultural intelligence (CQ).
Cultural intelligence is an essential skill for twenty-first century ministry leaders. It is what we need when we work with people from different cultural contexts, whether they’re across the street or in diverse cultural settings where people have cultural backgrounds that are different from your own.

- **What’s my level of confidence and motivation for this cross-cultural situation? If it’s lacking, what can I do to increase it?**

**Step 2. Knowledge (Cognitive CQ)** is understanding cross-cultural issues and differences. It is a person’s knowledge of how cultures are similar and how cultures are different. It includes knowledge about cultural universals (for example, all cultures have language, values, symbols, rituals) and about unique cultural characteristics (for example, unique values, social interaction norms, religious beliefs, economic and legal systems, aesthetic values). The point is not to be an expert on every culture but to understand core cultural differences and their effects on everyday business.

- **What cultural understanding do I need for this cross-cultural situation?**

**Step 3. Strategy (Metacognitive CQ)** is the degree to which people are mindful and aware when they interpret cross-culturally and make sense of culturally diverse experiences. Strategy CQ is awareness that individuals have different cultural value orientations and these different cultural value orientations influence perceptions, sense-making, motivation, and behavior. It includes thinking and strategizing before an encounter, checking assumptions during an encounter, and adjusting mental maps when actual experiences differ from expectations.

- **What do I need to plan in order to work cross-culturally effectively?**

**Step 4. Action (Behavioral CQ)** is the extent to which people appropriately change their verbal and nonverbal actions when they interact cross-culturally. It is the capability to change behavior to fit other cultures. This requires having a flexible repertoire of responses to suit various situations while still remaining true to one’s self. Action CQ includes having and using a flexible range of non-verbal behaviors (that is, body language, physical gestures, facial expressions); having and using a flexible range of verbal behaviors (that is, accent, tone, expressiveness); modifying typical behavior, based on cultural differences, to put others at ease; and changing both verbal and nonverbal actions to fit the specifics of particular cultural interactions or settings.

- **What behaviors, such as verbal and nonverbal communication, should I adapt for this cross-cultural situation?**

These four dimensions can be used by leaders as a four-step cycle for developing cultural intelligence both over the long haul and in case-by-case situations. Imagine using this process as a leader preparing to work with one cultural group (ethnic, social group, generational) in your church.

The four step cycle offers a promising way to move CQ from theory to practice. We can continually move through the four steps at a macro level in thinking about our overall leadership across a diversity of situations. And we can work through the loop even on the fly while engaging in cross-cultural conversations.
or multiple time zones away. Cultural intelligence is needed when pastoring a church or leading faith formation in multicultural America, leading a ministry that serves various generational cultures, participating in short-term mission trips, or figuring out the organization dynamics of ministry where we serve.

Works Cited

Assessment Tool
Use the following assessment tool to starting thinking about your own CQ. Identify a particular culture in your church community as a frame of reference: ethnic, generational socio-economic, and so on. Review the description of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence before you begin. Rate yourself on the following scale: 1 = none of this fits me, 2 = some of this fits me, 3 = most of the description fits me, 4 = all of this description fits me.

CQ Drive
I am motivated to learn and adapt to new and diverse cultural settings. I enjoy meeting people of different cultural backgrounds. I am confident in my adaptive abilities to perform in multicultural situations.

CQ Knowledge
I generally understand culture and how it affects the way people think and behave. I know about the basic ways that cultures are alike and different.

CQ Strategy
I draw on my cultural understanding to plan and interpret what’s going on in a situation. I am able to monitor, analyze, and adjust my behaviors in different cultural settings.

CQ Action
I have the ability to engage in effective, flexible leadership for a task. I am able to use a variety of behaviors, such as verbal and nonverbal communication, depending on the context.

Reflect
- Which of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence are strengths for you?
- Which of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence do you need to improve?
- How can you plan for improvement?

Study
- Review the strategies for advancing your CQ in chapter 15 of Cultural Intelligence and chapter 8 in Leading with Cultural Intelligence.
- Watch: David Livermore’s video presentation: www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMi7yhHjASQ
- Check out the resources online at Cultural Intelligence Center, http://culturqlq.com, and at http://davidlivermore.com/cq.

Improving Your Cultural Intelligence
(Summarized from Chapter 15 in Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage our Multicultural World by David Livermore, Baker Academic, 2009)

Core Commitments
Regardless of where you are in your own journey toward cultural intelligence, the following core commitments need to guide your perspective on how we think about advancing cultural intelligence in ourselves and others.

- Start the anthropological dig in your own soul. We have to first understand who we are before we can understand another.
- Root your view of the Other in the Imago Dei. If we view others as also created in the image of God it will shape how we relate.
- Seek first the Kingdom of God. We cannot separate our relating to others from our commitment to be Christians.
Live up close. Relationships—of all sorts—are messy. You have to live in relationship, seeking to engage the Other, not just observe from a distance.

Practices for Increasing CQ

With those core commitments in mind, let’s consider several practices, many of which you may already do, to enhance the development of cultural intelligence in yourself and others. Some of these practices emphasis one of the four factors more than the others, and many of them help develop two or three of the factors simultaneously.

1. **Read.** Read a lot, particularly from authors of different cultural backgrounds and books on subjects different from your own experience.

2. **Go to the movies.** Films can help transform the way we see the Other. Take in films that expose you to other cultures (and languages).

3. **Eat.** Eating foods from other places with people from those places can open up a new world of experience.

4. **Journal.** Writing can play a transformative role in helping us become more aware of ourselves, others, and our surroundings.

5. **Learn a new language.** Another language allows us to see the world differently and communicate with others.

6. **Attend cultural celebrations.** A good way to learn, through experience and participation, about another culture.

7. **Go to the Pride Parade and the Mosque.** Go to gatherings that are least aligned with your own leanings and seek to understand what’s behind the beliefs and behaviors of the group.

8. **Be informed.** Americans are notorious for being uninformed of global issues. Be informed.

9. **Look for the invisible.** Look for what is behind what is said or done, ask “how is the cultural informing this?”

10. **Study the Scripture with people from varied cultural perspectives.** It will open our horizons to understand how God works in the lives of others and expand our understand of God and faith.

11. **Always do mission with the “oppressed.”** Mission isn’t “for,” but “with.”

12. **Beware of culturally embedded language.** We must anticipate the impact of the words we use.

13. **Speak slowly.** Be attentive to how and in what manner we speak to others.

14. **Observe body language.** We speak in ways other than the spoken word, learn to be literate in those other expressions.

15. **Try mimicry.** Done in a respectful and thoughtful manner, mimicry can help one understand a particular culture.

16. **Find a cultural guide.** Effective cultural guides will use questions to guide us and offer support and feedback.

17. **Formal education.** College and graduate courses, workshops and other educational venues offer a solid foundation for ‘real-life experience’ in cross-cultural engagement.

18. **Multicultural groups and teams.** Culturally diverse groups offer you the opportunity to observe the behavior of culturally different individuals in the same context.

19. **Overseas experience.** Examining other cultures in-person, while also observing your own “from a distance,” is an essential part of developing cultural intelligence.

20. **Attend the wedding ceremony of someone from another culture.** Religious services or special ceremonies help us to learn about other cultures.

21. **Read the local paper, not USA Today, when traveling.** You can gain important insights about a culture by reading about it in real-time.

22. **Walk through the grocery story.** Going through a grocery store in a given place will offer valuable insights about the culture.

23. **Seek out the other.** Look for ways to experience life with people who don’t all look like you or see the world the way you do.

24. **Question, question, question.** Ask questions and listen hard.
Leading with Cultural Intelligence  
David Livermore (New York: AMACON, 2010)

What is CQ? And why do leaders need it in our increasingly connected world? Why are some leaders able to create trust and negotiate contracts with Chinese, Latin Americans, and Germans all in the same day, while others are barely able to manage the diversity in their own offices? The answer lies in their cultural intelligence, or CQ. Packed with practical tools, research, and case studies, Leading with Cultural Intelligence breaks new ground, offering today's global workforce a specific, four-step model to becoming more adept at managing across cultures: 1) Drive—show the interest and confidence to adapt cross-culturally; 2) Knowledge—understand how differences such as religion, family, education, legal, and economic influences affect the way people think and behave; 3) Strategy—monitor, analyze, and adjust plans in unfamiliar cultural setting; and 4) Action—choose the right verbal and nonverbal behaviors, depending on context. Practical and insightful, this indispensable guide shows leaders how to connect across any cultural divide, including national, ethnic, and organizational cultures.

Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World  
David A. Livermore (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009)

As twenty-first-century society grows increasingly complex, pluralistic, and multicultural, it behooves Christians to communicate effectively between and among diverse populations. Research indicates that missions often fail because of cultural collision and lack of empathy and understanding between different peoples. David Livermore proposes a meta model—based on sound research principles and social science methodology—for helping Christians intelligently navigate the multicultural maze in Cultural Intelligence. The much-needed skill of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) both at home and abroad is the ability to work effectively across national, ethnic, and even organizational cultures. Livermore explains that CQ is not simply learning how to externally modify behavior but is based on inward transformation. His work is replete with assessment tools, simulations, case studies, and reflective exercises.