

# Cultural Intelligence as the basis of Everyday Communication

Lana Miletić

University North, Croatia

Ana Globočnik Žunac

University North, Croatia

Darijo Čerepinko

University North, Croatia

## Abstract

With the increase in global connectivity between people, culture, and cultural patterns, cultural intelligence plays an ever-increasing role in each individual's life. Whether it is a business, scientific or private field, there is a need for specific competencies related to the possibility of understanding, accepting, and understanding the other, which is more often someone with whom the person does not share cultural heritage, values, or experiences. In order to overcome the barrier that is set up due to the differences above, cultural intelligence is needed. Therefore, this paper deals with the issue of cultural intelligence and aims to show why the issue of cultural intelligence is essential and how to approach it, given the lack of a generally accepted definition of cultural intelligence. The work will present different opinions related to the issue of cultural intelligence and discuss the progress in this field to date.

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## Introduction

Connection between people is greater. Thanks to advances in technology, countless contacts between people of different cultures are allowed. In the business world, to be successful, it is important to overcome differences, and consequently, certain competencies, including abilities, knowledge, and skills, are needed.

Communication, formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal, is the basis of every relationship between people. As people live and act together with other people, communication is of key importance for growth and development, but also the functioning of society in general. Networking and cross-networking people require certain skills for communication between them, as well as their relationships, to be successful. This is especially important because global connectivity also means the mixing of different cultures, cultural patterns, values, and customs. Therefore, it is of great importance to recognise and understand the differences that are possible during different relationships and communication. To be able to do this, a person needs a certain amount of cultural intelligence. Therefore, this paper starts with the thesis that cultural intelligence is extremely important in communication.

This paper aims to demonstrate the importance of cultural intelligence through secondary research, specifically research into existing literature dealing with the issues of cultural intelligence, cultural competence, and intercultural communication.

As cultural intelligence does not have one definition, but many authors have given their views and their theory about (cultural) intelligence, this paper will show that, regardless of the lack of a universally accepted definition, authors dealing with the issue of cultural intelligence show and emphasise its importance in (successful) communication and relationships between people.

This work also aims to show how the importance of cultural intelligence and cultural competencies is recognised in different areas, which is reflected in documents important for the functioning of certain institutions, states, and formal communities.

At a time when information is everything, and communication is one of the key prerequisites for success, both in the private and the business and scientific fields, it is necessary to have certain competencies. Increasing global connectivity contributes to the need for increasing interaction among people from different backgrounds, whether in scientific circles or business and even private. According to Geertz (Cervone & Pervin, 2013), "There is no such thing as the independence of human nature from culture". It is this that highlights the importance of intercultural competencies and intelligence because contact with culture influences human behaviour and cultural judgments, decision-making, cultural adaptation, and efficiency in doing business in culturally diverse situations (Goltnik Urnaut, 2014). All this confirms the importance of intercultural intelligence and intercultural competencies for business success and the ability to advance and achieve pre-set business goals.

Thanks to global connectivity and technological advances, everyone has the opportunity to establish a multitude of contacts in an instant, regardless of the time and space in which they are located, thus achieving increasing networking among people. That is why there is an increasing communication and relations between people of different climates, language preferences, cultures, countries, and life habits (Miladrović et al., 2010). However, in order for this communication between people of different characteristics to be possible, mutual understanding is needed. It is possible to overcome differences if each of the communicators has the capabilities, abilities, knowledge and skills to cope with different life situations. More specifically, it is about the expressed necessary competencies that enable the performance of work, both in the profession in the field of communication and in other areas due to

the variability of the socio-cultural context, regardless of which aspect of an individual's life.

In today's age of global connectivity, intercultural competencies, intelligence and intercultural communication are very important. The lack of competencies and intelligence focused on interculturality makes it impossible to understand the content, processes, values, languages, customs, and ways of functioning important for not only doing business but also scientific work in a particular field (Piršl et al., 2018), which prevents progress.

Each person functions on the principle of categorisation and association of meanings based on what has been learned so far (in theory) and previous experiences (own or others). "The creation of categorisations and the association of meanings is connected with the educational process, so it is significantly dependent on the culture in which a person grew up and which influenced him". (Globočnik et al., 2021) This is another indicator of how the cultural environment affects the individual and his relationship with others.

As stated by Hoffman (2013), interculturality refers to the mediation that occurs during exchanges between different cultures, which enables the parties participating in the exchange and the relationship to identify and understand their differences. In this way, the cultural signs that people exchange, which are different, create communicative acts that are considered intercultural communication. "Interculturality, therefore, refers to the constellation of encounters between two (or more) subjects who, in the exchange, constitute diversity that is perceived as relevant in a given constellation. The intercultural phenomenon describes an intermediate space in which supposedly solid boundaries disappear and in the process of "negotiation" new boundaries can be drawn". (Hoffman 2013)

As global connectivity between individuals, cultures, and cultural patterns continues to grow, cultural intelligence becomes increasingly important in the lives of each person. In various domains like as business, science, or personal relationships, there is a requirement for particular skills that involve the ability to comprehend, embrace, and empathise with individuals who possess different cultural backgrounds, values, or life experiences. Cultural intelligence is necessary to overcome the barriers caused by differences. This paper addresses the topic of cultural intelligence. It seeks to demonstrate its importance and provide guidance on how to approach it, considering the absence of a widely agreed-upon definition of cultural intelligence. The study will give diverse perspectives pertaining to the matter of cultural intelligence and analyse the advancements made in this domain up until now.

## Literature review

### *Intercultural competencies*

Competencies, regardless of type, always refer to a certain amount of an individual's ability to do something, to understand something and to participate in something. In addition, this ability is related to the knowledge and skills of the individual, depending on what competencies are involved. Intercultural competence is thus a combination of knowledge and the ability to meet others effectively. It is an essential tool for work and life in culturally plural societies because it makes it easier for people to engage in cultural exchanges through everyday communication and interaction (Piršl et al., 2018, according to Eni SpA, 2011). Thanks to globalisation, increasingly inclusive migrations with the lack of barriers that existed before (whether it is transport-related impossibilities, border crossings, or physical distances) and advances in technology that allow contact regardless of physical proximity or distance, the diversity of societies

is even greater than ever. Everyone belongs to a certain society and culture, which nurtures certain ways of communicating, behaving, treating others, and understanding. All this is manifested, especially in diverse societies in which there are several members of different cultures, in the functioning of that society, communication, and the level of ability to perform certain tasks assigned to that society.

Intercultural competence implies the existence of "intercultural sensitivity, the ability to develop positive emotions through understanding and acceptance of cultural differences and the promotion of appropriate and effective behaviours in intercultural communication" (Drandić et al., 2015). Drandić et al. (2015) add that intercultural sensitivity includes the ability to recognise, acknowledge and respect each other's cultural differences. Cultural diversity is thus not a condition descriptive as an objectively existent difference of static structures to features that have their names, but precisely the result of attribution that takes place in the process of encounter (Hoffman et al., 2013). All of the above shows that intercultural competencies are a daily need in an individual's life so that one can communicate and coexist with others, interact with them, do tasks, and contribute to progress.

Globalised everyday life enables countless contacts regardless of time and space, thanks to modern technologies and networking, as well as traffic connections. For this reason, openness between cultures is important so that communication and business can take place without problems; in short, a state of interculturalism is needed. Interculturalism means understanding and active interaction with others, where understanding does not mean accumulating information but dialogue, listening and responding because mere tolerance as passive acceptance or perception is not enough, and it does not oblige one's attitude towards established diversity (Center for Intercultural Communication, 2023). An active relationship leads to the confrontation of ideas, changes in ways of thinking, and deeper reflection on certain topics, and all this leads to progress, respect and equality as important values and goals emphasised in all important documents of existing democracies in the world.

### *Intercultural intelligence*

When it comes to intercultural competencies, it is important to include intelligence as well. Intelligence is not an unambiguous term, and there is no consensus on what exactly intelligence is and what is not, which is why there are different models and approaches to intelligence. There is no single answer to the question of what intercultural intelligence is, but also intelligence in general, and how to measure each of them. Following Gardner's rates and his model of multiple intelligences (Laursen et al., 2013), a conclusion about intercultural intelligence can be drawn based on a trace of his interpersonal intelligence. Thus, intercultural intelligence, according to Gardner's model, can be understood as the ability to understand and accept, understand the differences and similarities with others, which are a consequence of belonging to a particular culture (Liao et al.; Thomas et al., 2020).

On the other hand, Earley and Mosakowski (2004) explained intercultural intelligence as one's seemingly innate ability to interpret the unknown and ambiguous gestures of a person belonging to another culture in the way that members of that same culture would interpret it. Also, Earley and Ang (Ang et al., 2007) defined cultural intelligence as a person's ability to adapt to new cultural contexts through a concept that contains four aspects: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural. Each of these aspects refers to a specific part, so the cognitive aspect makes specific knowledge that people acquire about a new culture, metacognitively makes superior judgments that people make about their thought processes, the motivational aspect

refers to the tendency to act on the cognitive aspect and persistence in acquiring knowledge and a behavioural aspect that includes the ability to perform a desired or intended action. According to Thomas (Thomas et al., et al. 2015), intercultural intelligence is an ability that enables effectiveness in intercultural interactions.

In order for an individual to be able to react in different situations, to position oneself as an equal communicator, to be able to understand the other side and to be able to relate to it, it is important to have pronounced intercultural intelligence, regardless of whether intercultural intelligence is meant as the concept of awareness, and as a key component that connects knowledge with behavioural abilities (Thomas et al., 2006) or intercultural intelligence is perceived as a key mediator between proactive personality and social adjustment (Hu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Earley and Mosakowski (2004) created profiles of cultural intelligence to concretise intercultural intelligence and present it through numerical expressions. Profiling includes four statements related to each aspect (cognitive, physical and emotional/motivational), which are graded by respondents from 1 to 5, where 1 denotes the expression of complete disagreement and 5 is complete agreement. The numbers next to each statement are summed (by aspects and in three separate parts) and divided by four. The resulting final figure shows the degree of each aspect, and the average of these three aspects gives the respondents' degree of cultural intelligence. Results whose average is below three show a lack of intercultural intelligence where there is room for progress and empowerment, while results above 4.5 indicate strong intercultural intelligence.

Each of the aspects (cognitive, physical and emotional/motivational) has a set of four statements to which the respondent assigns a number from 1 to 5, depending on the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement (according to the principle stated above: 1 indicates complete disagreement, and 5 agree). For cognitive cultural intelligence, the sentences encountered by the respondent are: "Before I interact with people from a new culture, I ask myself what I hope to achieve", "If I encounter something unexpected while working in a new culture, I use this experience to figure out new ways to approach other cultures in the future", "I plan how I am going to relate to people from a different culture before I meet them" and "When I come into a new cultural situation, I can immediately sense whether something is going well or something is wrong" (Early, Mosakowski, 2004).

For physical cultural intelligence, the following statements were made: "It is easy for me to change my body language (for example, eye contact or posture) to suit people from a different culture", "I can alter my expression when a cultural encounter requires it", "I modify my speech style (for example, accent or tone) to suit people from a different culture" and "I easily change the way I act when a cross-cultural encounter seems to require it" (Early, Mosakowski, 2004).

For emotional/motivational cultural intelligence, the respondent should declare himself according to these sentences: "I have confidence that I can deal well with people from a different culture", "I am certain that I can befriend people whose cultural backgrounds are different from mine", "I can adapt to the lifestyle of a different culture with relative ease" and "I am confident that I can deal with a cultural situation that's unfamiliar" (Early, Mosakowski, 2004).

### *Intercultural education*

Whereas intercultural intelligence, together with intercultural competencies, is defined as the ability, and abilities can be influenced, either positively or negatively, i.e. reduced or increased, international experience and education are emphasised in the national education curriculum, strategies of European countries and the European

Union, but also in many statutes and founding documents of individual universities. All of this points to an understanding of the importance of intercultural education and an emphasis on the same. The evaluation of international experience and education during schooling is reflected in the encouragement of educational institutions from the earliest days, from primary school through secondary education to college, and the award of special, additional points for participation in international programs such as Erasmus+ (Erasmus+, 2023). Intercultural education includes cooperation with others, learning in different environments and conditions, information exchange and communication with each other. It is a system and the result of numerous formal, non-formal, and informal educational programs that aim to achieve respect and mutual understanding among members of different groups (European Commission, 2018), which means strengthening the intercultural competencies of individuals.

## Methodology

The research aimed to answer the question of whether cultural intelligence is necessary for modern (everyday) communication. The starting point of the work is that the answer is affirmative, and cultural intelligence is important and necessary for everyday communication.

As this is a theoretical paper, the existing literature on the topic of cultural intelligence and communication was searched and researched. Using the keywords "intercultural", "intelligence", "communication", and "role of intercultural intelligence in communication", the database of scientific works Scopus was researched. Recently found titles and works published in the past five years from the field of social sciences and related to the topic of this work are presented below.

In Scopus, a search of the keywords "intercultural", "intelligence", and "communication" (additionally through the expanded phrase "role of intercultural intelligence in communication") found a total of 71 papers that correspond to the keywords (Scopus, 2023). However, not all titles are related to the topic of this work, so not all of them will be presented, but those that can be directly related to the hypothesis and ones that, at the core, deal with the issue of cultural intelligence, cooperation and, consequently, communication.

## Results

Based on the search of the scientific database, and in accordance with the parameter that the titles found are not, according to the publication, older than five years, it turned out that a large number of works on the topic of intercultural and communication are related to the global situation with the disease COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, more precisely, issues such as virtual teams, work organisation and online collaboration (Henderson et al., 2018; Presbitero et al., 2020; Stoica et al., 2023). As the virtual and "home office", thanks to the pandemic, have become a common way of everyday work and communication, at the same time enabling instant communication with a person anywhere in the world, the question of cultural intelligence has often been observed, analysed and researched in the papers that were researched.

The paper of Yari et al. (2020) deals with the question of cultural intelligence and connects it with cross-cultural competencies and a global way of thinking. Their work puts these three terms in a synonymous relationship. This confirms that there is no single accepted concept and definition of cultural intelligence, as stated at the beginning of this paper. Also, the research done by the authors showed that the concept of cultural intelligence is very often related to the topic of team cooperation, as well as

to the field of business, people management (managerial competence) and organisational skills. All these concepts are closely related to communication, which is their basis for execution.

Fang et al. (2018) provide an answer to the question of effectiveness in intercultural environments. They say that cultural intelligence is one of the answers to the question of why some people operate more effectively and others less effectively in intercultural environments. According to them, the predictors of cultural intelligence are individual traits and abilities and the (non)existence of intercultural experience. People whose cultural intelligence is more pronounced or exists to a greater extent are more effective in intercultural environments.

According to Alexandra (2022), "increasing globalisation and cultural diversity have accentuated the importance of developing cross-cultural competencies like cultural intelligence..." This work also emphasises the importance and necessity of cultural intelligence in today's globalised, culturally diverse world.

Cultural intelligence is a necessary predisposition for entering the world of modern business (Key et al., 2022). Anyone who wants to be an expert in their field, regardless of which field, must be able to work in virtual, at the same time, multicultural teams, which requires high sensitivity to different situations and people, as well as the ability to adapt (Key et al., 2022). As the basis of cooperation is communication, it can be concluded that cultural intelligence is necessary for communication and cooperation in teams to exist and to be successful.

One of the areas covered in the researched scientific works is the medical one. In more detail, the issue of training nurses was addressed, more precisely, the importance of cultural intelligence and intercultural effectiveness for the possibility of effectively teaching culturally diverse groups of future medical personnel (Skaria & Montayre, 2023). For the same group of people, nurses Majda et al. (2021) evaluated the effectiveness of cultural education, cultural intelligence, and cultural competence. They concluded that "in order to provide health care that is adequate to cultural needs, medical students and healthcare professionals must be properly trained" (Majda et al., 2021). In this way, they showed the importance of training for culturally diverse situations that medical personnel in general, and especially nurses as the most frequent communicators with patients and their relatives, encounter.

It was also researched how, when learning a foreign language, in this case English, it is necessary to develop cultural intelligence, not only learning words and grammatical rules of the language (Clouet et al., 2022). Also, one of the papers deals with the issue of cultural awareness and the need to develop it as a curriculum for members of humanitarian, non-governmental organisations (Hart et al., 2021). The work thus brings ten basic cultural competencies for the training of personnel in humanitarian, non-governmental organisations.

Ishakova and Ott (2020) investigated cultural intelligence at the team level and compared and related it to team performance. They showed how culturally diverse teams lead to skill development because there is a larger "pool" of different skills that team members can learn from each other. Also, there is a possibility that, due to cultural differences, an individual meets one of the skills for the first time. In a different constellation of the team, with members who are more culturally similar, he might never have the opportunity to meet and learn certain skills and knowledge.

## Concluding remarks

Communication is necessary within the team so that the team can function, solve tasks together, and reach the desired goal. That is why the work of Key et al. (2022) confirms the hypothesis that cultural intelligence is necessary for communication.

According to them, cultural intelligence is a prerequisite for a successful business that involves the interaction of at least two people who communicate with each other.

All the analysed scientific works and papers presented in the Results confirm the thesis about the importance and necessity of cultural intelligence in everyday life. Various fields, both business and scientific, have shown in the analysed works that cultural intelligence, together with cultural competencies, is of great importance for the successful performance of work and enables cooperation and communication.

Additionally, the pandemic context, as an important part of the papers published within the last three years, showed the importance of intercultural and the need for intercultural intelligence. The pandemic affected the whole world, and intercultural competencies and intelligence were needed and necessary for communication and understanding among different groups of people who suddenly found themselves in a new situation, a situation that is perceived and understood differently among included persons.

As Alexandra et al. (2022) state, the importance of cultural intelligence has proven to be great in a globalised and culturally diverse world. When taking into account the context and the time in which the paper was created and published, this conclusion was reached at a time when the world is in a corona-crisis in which it has been shown that it is possible, and necessary, to work from home, physically distant from everyone, and yet, online connected to everyone at all times, with the ability to communicate with everyone through various digital and electronic devices connected to the Internet.

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## About the authors

Lana Miletić is a doctoral student in the third year of their postgraduate doctoral study in Media and Communication at the University North. She is also an assistant in the field of business psychology and business communication. Her areas of interest are communication, relations among people and intelligence. Podravka Inc. currently employs her in Public Relations. She participated in international conferences where her work was published: <https://www.bib.irb.hr/profile/37905>. The author can be contacted at [lamiletic@unin.hr](mailto:lamiletic@unin.hr).

Ana Globočnik Žunac completed PhD at the University of Zagreb in the field of Information and communication sciences. She was executive director of HEI Effectus in Zagreb and later assistant to vice-rector for scientific work and international affairs at University North, where she works as an assistant professor. She was a visiting lecturer at the University of Prague and the University of Tirana. She was twice awarded for the best paper and was praised for her exceptional contribution to the development of the Department of Communication and PR. She is the co-author of two university scholars.

Darijo Čerepinko is an Associate Professor of Communication at the University North in Croatia. He is also a seasoned Public Relations consultant based in Zagreb. He has extensive experience in political marketing, media relations, and election campaigns, including work for the Croatian Parliament (2003, 2007, 2011) and the 2009 presidential election. He has consulted on government projects, advised political party members, and served as a lecturer, media trainer, and consultant for various clients, including projects funded by organisations like the European Commission, World Bank, and USAID. Darijo also has a background as a former journalist. The author can be contacted at [darijoc@unin.hr](mailto:darijoc@unin.hr).