

Miletić, Lana; Globočnik Žunac, Ana; Antić, Marko

Article

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ENTRENOVA - ENTERprise REsearch InNOVation

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IRENET - Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy, Zagreb

Suggested Citation: Miletić, Lana; Globočnik Žunac, Ana; Antić, Marko (2025) : Sociodemographic Factors of Intercultural Intelligence and Competence, ENTRENOVA - ENTERprise REsearch InNOVation, ISSN 2706-4735, IRENET - Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy, Zagreb, Vol. 10, Iss. 1, pp. 53-63,
<https://doi.org/10.54820/entrenova-2024-0006>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/317949>

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Sociodemographic Factors of Intercultural Intelligence and Competence

Lana Miletić

University North, Croatia

Ana Globočnik Žunac

University North, Croatia

Marko Antić

University North, Croatia

Abstract

The interdependence of people and the connection and networking are components of today's everyday business life. It is for this reason that communication plays a major role in all aspects of life, including in business. As physical boundaries are no longer an obstacle to successful business and distance can be overcome in just a few clicks on one of the smart devices, the need to master new skills is a necessity. Availability and work with colleagues, partners, people of other cultural assumptions and understanding of relationships and business require the existence of intercultural intelligence in everyone involved in the relationship. This paper aims to show which are the sociodemographic variables that influence, and to what extent, the intercultural competence of an individual.

Keywords: intercultural communication, intercultural intelligence, intercultural competences

JEL classification: D83

Paper type: Research article

Received: 15 April 2024

Accepted: 17 July 2024

DOI: 10.54820/entrenova-2024-0006

Acknowledgments: The publishing of this paper is financially supported by University North, Croatia.

Introduction

Today's world stands on the foundations of what Marshall McLuhan announced back in the sixties of the last century - and that is the world as a global village (Zgrabljic Rotar et. al., 2008). Distances between people, closeness and (or) its appearance and the connection of people regardless of physical distance, have been made possible thanks to the development of technology, the Internet, digital tools, and social networks. This is confirmed by the universally accepted term for today as the digital age, which is associated with the appearance of the Internet and its influence on all aspects of life (Zgrabljic Rotar et. al., 2008). „A key concern of international businesses of today is how they can manage communication across borders“ (Chong, 2020). Increasingly inclusive migrations with the lack of barriers that existed before (whether it is transport-related impossibilities, border crossings, physical distances) and advances in technology that allow contact regardless of physical distance, make diversity of societies is even greater. Everyone nurtures certain ways of behaving, treating others, understanding. All this is manifested, especially in societies with several members of different cultures, in the functioning and communication, the level of ability to perform certain tasks assigned to that society.

The question of intercultural communication is not a question that was raised a few years ago: it has been present since the time of different cultures and since man began to observe those who do not behave the same as him, as an observer - the question of intercultural communication and theory can also be called an ancient phenomenon (Sabirjanovna, 2020). But intercultural communication and intercultural theory have been discussed more intensively since the middle of the 20th century, with the beginning of globalization (Sabirjanovna, 2020).

Speech, or language, is exactly what distinguishes people from other beings. Although all living beings communicate, the only thing reserved for humans is that they can use speech, communicate in a certain language. The main function of language is to enable communication between people, but language can also lead to misunderstanding (Sabirjanovna, 2022).

Understanding implies successful communication between people, communication that is clear and perceived equally by all involved. Understanding is, "in a broader sense, a meaningful comprehension of things, the intellectual ability to realize the wider context of a phenomenon, knowing the language or realizing someone's messages, including a read text, sympathy and intuition between people, enjoying interpersonal communication and self-awareness. In a narrower sense, understanding is the comprehension of the subjective meaning of a person's actions in the company of other persons" (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2023).

That is why the question of intercultural communication is very important in today's conditions when the intercultural environment is the dominant environment, with a tendency to further growth due to the daily increase of various intercultural contacts between people who differ on almost all grounds: from culture, geographical position, language, lifestyle, ... (Miladrović, 2010). This applies to a large number of people, almost every individual today, regardless of the type of work one does and where one is.

The diversity of cultures and languages is what is set as important in the time of the digital age: the physical barrier represented by the distance between people has been overcome, but there remains a linguistic or cultural barrier that cannot be overcome with one click of the mouse and by opening a particular application or e-mail or messages, or by establishing a video call. Communication, which means overcoming language and cultural barriers, requires more. This includes certain

competencies and knowledge that are needed to communicate with different people who are present virtually at a given moment.

Since today's age is a digital age, it has brought with it its own kind of culture, digital culture⁷. "Digital culture combines all types of art and represents a specific way of consumption as well as production of cultural content. Digital culture, ..., also presupposes a specific type of education. Citizens without the necessary education, ..., cannot achieve real participation in the processes of the new digital cultural scene" (Zgrabljic Rotar et. al., 2017). The role of education is all the clearer when it is defined as "a type of communication that defines the role of the individual in society" (Žitinski, 2006).

Education is also important in the life of every individual, but "the problem of education is by no means simple, it is related to the knowledge that we create in order to interpret the world we live in" (Žitinski, 2006). This is precisely why there is no simple and unequivocal education that is learned once and then applies everywhere and in all situations. Lifelong learning and education as a necessity (Zoretić, 2003) is used very often as a statement, but access and opportunities for education are not equal (Bouillet, Brajković, 2023). Lifelong education, formal or informal, is seen as a necessity in a world that is constantly changing and becoming increasingly diverse. „The global goals of teaching intercultural communication are reflected in achieving international harmony, simplifying and facilitating intercultural communication, and contributing to the neutralization of stereotypes" (Sabirjanovna, 2022).

Therefore, it is necessary that, with daily changes, people constantly invest in themselves in order to be able to respond to all the demands that situations require of them. This also applies to communication.

Globalized business seeks for openness between cultures that relay on communication. In order for communication to be possible, especially when it comes to an intercultural environment, competences are needed. Primarily, here it is considered necessary to have intercultural competences. When speaking of intercultural competences, it implies that a person has skills that include 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 behaviors in intercultural communication"¹². This very explanation indicates the importance of possessing intercultural competences in the present time, which is characterized by countless intercultural interactions.

Although there is no single unambiguous definition of intelligence, each suggests that intelligence is a set of competencies or abilities (Laursen, 2013; Liao, Thomas, 2020; Earley, Mosakowski, 2004; Hu, Liu, Zhang, Wang, 2020; Ang et. al, 2007). Therefore, it is important to consider intercultural intelligence as a factor that contributes to and influences intercultural communication.

As there is no single definition of intelligence, there is no single definition of intercultural intelligence either. That is why this paper refers to and rests on the findings and conclusions of Earley, Mosakowski and Ang (Earley, Mosakowski, 2004; Ang et. al., 2007).

„Earley and Mosakowski 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. Earley and Ang 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 behavioral. 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 own thought processes, the motivational aspect refers to the tendency to act on the cognitive aspect and persistence in acquiring knowledge and a behavioral aspect that includes the ability to perform a desired or intended action." (Miletić, Globočnik Žunac, Čerepinko, 2023).

Additionally, man, with his nature, is dependent on culture (Cervone, Pervin, 2013). That is precisely why intercultural intelligence and the possession of intercultural competencies are important, which enable and influence successful intercultural communication, and thus successful business and the achievement of goals in an intercultural environment. Human contact with culture leads to certain behaviors, affects human behavior and efficiency in achieving goals in a multicultural environment (Goltnik Urnaut, 2014).

„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 doing business, but also scientific work in a particular field, which prevents progress“ (Miletić, Globočnik Žunac, Čerepinko, 2023).

Table 1

Correlation between Intercultural Intelligence (CQ) and Gender

		Gender	CQ
Gender	Pearson	1	.062
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.278
	N	305	305
CQ	Pearson	.062	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.278	
	N	305	305

Source: research conducted by the author

Table 2

Correlation between Intercultural Intelligence (CQ) and Age of the Respondents (Age)

		CQ	Age
CQ	Pearson	1	.014
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.807
	N	305	305
Age	Pearson	.014	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.807	
	N	305	305

Source: research conducted by the author

Table 3

Correlation between Intercultural Intelligence (CQ) and Years of Work Experience (Work Experience)

		CQ	Work Experience
CQ	Pearson Correlation	1	.026
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.651
	N	305	305
Work Experience	Pearson Correlation	.026	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.651	
	N	305	305

Source: research conducted by the author

Table 4

Correlation between Intercultural Intelligence (CQ) and Current Workplace (Workplace)

		CQ	Workplace
CQ	Pearson Correlation	1	-.113*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.049
	N	305	305
Workplace	Pearson Correlation	-.113*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	
	N	305	305

Source: research conducted by the author

Table 5

Correlation between Intercultural Intelligence (CQ) and Current Work in an International Environment (International Environment)

		CQ	International Environment
CQ	Pearson Correlation	1	-.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.725
	N	305	305
International Environment	Pearson Correlation	-.020	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.725	
	N	305	305

Source: research conducted by the author

Table 6

Correlation between Intercultural Intelligence (CQ) and International Work Experience

		CQ	International Work Experience
CQ	Pearson Correlation	1	-.154**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	305	305
International Work Experience	Pearson Correlation	-.154**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	305	305

Source: research conducted by the author

Table 7

Correlation between Intercultural Intelligence (CQ) and the Amount of Intercultural Interactions in the Workplace

		CQ	Intercultural Interactions in the Workplace
CQ	Pearson Correlation	1	.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.109
	N	305	305
Intercultural Interactions in the Workplace	Pearson Correlation	.092	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.109	
	N	305	305

Source: research conducted by the author

Methodology

The research aimed to answer the questions to what extent individuals have developed intercultural intelligence and intercultural competencies and how they are affected by gender, age, years of work experience, work in an international environment and the amount of intercultural interactions in the workplace. Therefore, the tasks of the research were to determine the degree of intercultural intelligence of the respondents and sociodemographic characteristics of each respondent and to analyze the interdependence of the examined variables and thus measure the pre-set hypotheses.

Data for analysis were collected through an online questionnaire designed in the Google Forms tool with closed-ended questions, where respondents were offered an answer in advance. The questionnaire consisted of sociodemographic questions about age, gender, type of workplace, international work experience and intercultural interactions in the workplace, and a translated and revised questionnaire

for the development of Cultural Intelligence Profiles⁹ on tolerance issues. The collected data and completed questionnaires were analyzed in the SPSS statistical program. The questionnaire was open during the second half of June and the first half of July 2020.

Hypotheses

With the desire to investigate the influence of sociodemographic characteristics on intercultural competencies and intercultural intelligence, the following hypotheses were formed:

H1. There is no difference in the level of intercultural intelligence according to gender.

H2. There is no difference in the level of intercultural intelligence according to age.

H3. There is no difference in the level of intercultural intelligence according to years of work experience.

H4. There is a positive correlation between intercultural intelligence and working in an international environment. / Those who work in an international environment have higher cultural intelligence.

H5. There is a positive correlation between the amount of intercultural interactions in the workplace and intercultural intelligence.

Results

The data collected by the online questionnaire refer to 305 respondents who joined the survey, of which 185 female and 120 male. Prior to the analysis of the respondents' answers, the obtained data were transferred from the Google Forms questionnaire to the Excel program, and individual data were grouped in order to be analyzed in accordance with the set hypotheses.

Answers to questions related to cultural intelligence (CQ) were grouped: first all results were calculated according to Cultural Intelligence Profiles⁹ which were then placed in three groups according to their amounts, and in accordance with the calculation of (inter)cultural intelligence according to Earley and Mosakowski:

$CQ < 3$ – lack of CQ

$3 \leq CQ \leq 4,5$ – good CQ

$CQ \geq 4,5$ – strong CQ

After grouping, the data were analyzed in the SPSS program.

According to TABLE 1, obtained results show that there is no significant difference in the level of intercultural intelligence with respect to gender. Belonging hypothesis is confirmed because there is no significant difference in the results that would indicate that one sex is ahead in the level of intercultural intelligence only on that basis.

Comparison of intercultural intelligence among different age groups (according to the following value designations: 1 = 0 - 25 years, 2 = 26 - 35 years, 3 = 36 - 45 years, 4 = 46 - 55, 5 = 56 - 65), the analysis showed that there is no significant difference in the level of intercultural intelligence with regard to age and thus hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

The hypothesis saying there is no difference between intercultural intelligence with regard to the number of years of work experience was also confirmed as it is shown at Table 3.

The hypotheses saying: 'There is a positive correlation between intercultural intelligence and working in an international environment.' and 'Those who work in an international environment have higher cultural intelligence.', according to the results shown in the table 4 were confirmed. Intercultural communication here implies business contact and cooperation with people of other cultures and a negative

correlation between intercultural intelligence and the workplace with intercultural communication opportunities is detected.

No significant correlation between the level of intercultural intelligence and currently working in the international environment is found (Table 5) and therefore the hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

In the case of finding the answer to the question if international work experience (work in an international company, work with colleagues from other countries, work outside Croatia) is correlated with intercultural intelligence, a negative has been found (shown in Table 6).

The question of intercultural interactions experience in the workplace (concrete cooperation, learning, work with members of other cultures) put in correlation with intercultural intelligence shows that between these two variables, the amount of intercultural interactions in the workplace and intercultural intelligence, no significant correlations were found. Thus, according to Table 7, the hypothesis was not confirmed although the result shows, to a lesser extent and without significance, that there is a positive relationship between the two examined variables.

Discussion

As it is presented, three of five hypotheses are to be accepted, one is partially accepted, and one is to be rejected:

H1. There is no difference in the level of intercultural intelligence according to gender. - confirmed

H2. There is no difference in the level of intercultural intelligence according to age. - confirmed

H3. There is no difference in the level of intercultural intelligence according to years of work experience. - confirmed

H4. There is a positive correlation between intercultural intelligence and working in an international environment. / Those who work in an international environment have higher cultural intelligence. – partially confirmed

H5. There is a positive correlation between the amount of intercultural interactions in the workplace and intercultural intelligence. – not confirmed

The analysis showed that there is no significant difference in the level of intercultural intelligence with regard to age. This result may come as a surprise if one considers that older respondents also have more life experience. On the other hand, this is not surprising because not all respondents were in the same situations, some with fewer years have more intercultural experience and more contact with different situations, which allows higher intercultural intelligence regardless of age.

According to the results, the amount and length of work experience does not mean that a person had more intercultural experience than a person with fewer years of work experience, which could have affected the level of intercultural intelligence.

Results connected to hypotheses "There is a positive correlation between intercultural intelligence and working in an international environment." and "Those who work in an international environment have higher cultural intelligence." are shown in the tables 4 – 6. Those hypotheses are partially accepted because negative correlation between intercultural intelligence and the workplace with intercultural communication opportunities is detected. Also, no significant correlation between the level of intercultural intelligence and currently working in the international environment is found. The reason may be found in the fact that respondents who have higher intercultural intelligence have more intercultural experience outside the business environment. Also, the respondent can be at current job for not a long time

and the previous job may have had an impact on an individual's intercultural intelligence to a greater extent. People who have international work experience (in any part of their career) have higher intercultural intelligence (table 6) and therefore the hypotheses 4 are partially confirmed.

Conclusion

The importance of intercultural competencies and intercultural intelligence is evident in the everyday situations of each individual and in business environment even greater. Therefore, it is important to see what affects them, in what way, and to know what happens if certain characteristics and situations change. It is crucial for managing successful intercultural (business) communication. Although not all hypotheses of this paper have been confirmed, there is a significance and connection between intercultural intelligence and the current workplace of respondents where it is shown how a workplace with (more) intercultural communication leads to greater intercultural intelligence of respondents. Also, it has been shown that international work experience also influences that intercultural intelligence is higher in people who have such work experience. On the other hand, the correlation between intercultural intelligence and intercultural interactions in the workplace is not significant, which does not confirm the hypothesis, but there is a result that shows that a positive correlation exists at least in small quantities. Such results form the basis for further research that would include a larger number of respondents, but also not only theoretical self-analysis of respondents but also research through specific intercultural situations. For example, turn the questions answered by the respondents into a specific situation and observe how the person really reacts and evaluate them accordingly by a neutral researcher/observer and allow them to evaluate themselves and then compare the results.

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About the authors

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

Ana Globočnik Žunac has PhD in Information Communication Science at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. Employed as an associate professor at University North, Department of Business and Management, her research focus is organizational communication and interpersonal relationships within business processes. She teaches business communication and human resource management subjects and is a scientific associate in interdisciplinary field of economics and information communication sciences. She has worked on international academic cooperation development and is a member of international scientific editorials. She received several awards and a prize for developing communicational sciences. The author can be contacted at mail: ana.globocnik.zunac@unin.hr

Marko Antić holds a bachelor's and master's degree in nursing and now he is a PhD student in the field of media and communication at University North, Croatia. His main research interests are related to communication in the healthcare system. Author can be contacted at email: marantic@unin.hr