Intelligence Through a Cultural Lens: In the Workplace

Sarah Craft

There are many ways to measure intelligence, like using the psychometric approach (Shiraev & Levy, 2024), where one's intelligence is assigned a numerical value. However, these intelligence tests often ignore many variables like cultural background. Following the psychometric approach, an individual can be assigned a numerical value of 'intelligence' that does not reflect the individual's actual mental capacity simply because the test did not accommodate their cultural lens, or the way they interpret the world through their culture. Likewise, in the workplace many leadership roles take a similar approach, often ignoring the cultural lens that their team members may be looking through. Effective leadership across cultures requires more than traditional 'one size fits all' management.

The article *Leadership Behaviors and Leader Effectiveness: The Mediating Role of Cultural Intelligence* by Ayça Yüksel Sakınç and Ercan Ergün (2024) investigates how cultural intelligence influences the relationship between leadership behaviors and effectiveness. The researchers utilized a quantitative, survey-based survey. The surveys were designed to test if having more knowledge on your team members cultural lens makes leading more effective. The surveys collected data from 34 hotels located in Istanbul, Turkey. Collecting data from hotels provided more of an opportunity for cross-cultural comparison, as Istanbul's hospitality industry regularly serves international guests. The participants in the survey were 410 employees, most of whom were male, and received a 82% valid response rate (Sakınç & Ergün, 2024). The survey consisted of a five-point scale, and asked questions based on leadership behaviors, cultural intelligence, and leadership effectiveness. The major findings of the study were that employees who perceived their managers as supportive, innovative, and culturally intelligent were able to lead more effectively.

What does effective leading mean to the employees? It depends on where you are in the workspace, but most spaces favor either egalitarian or hierarchical workflows (Meyer, 2014). A few of the general traits of egalitarian workspaces are the boss being directly integrated on the main workfloor. There is no separation between the boss and employees most of the time with egalitarian spaces. On the other side of the spectrum, hierarchical workspaces have an established chain-of-command; the bosses set the daily work pace and make all decisions. The best leaders know how to work in both spaces. Sakınç and Ergün (2024) examined how exactly those behaviors can be interpreted by employees in Istanbul's hospitality district, but imagine if a manager accustomed to egalitarian leadership begins working with employees used to hierarchical leading methods. The manager may need to adjust their communication methods to reach the same level of success they were having at the previous workplace.

Another thing to evaluate when considering culture in the workplace is cognitive style. Cognitive style is similar to cultural lens in the way that certain individuals tend to perceive the world on different spectrums. Shiraev & Levy (2024) state that field-dependent learners are more aware of external context, whereas field-independent learners tend to be autonomous. For example, a field-dependent person may be particularly attentive to the expectations of a hierarchical workplace (Meyer, 2014). Not only is it pertinent to keep your team members' cognitive style in mind when making decisions, but it is also important to consider their cultural background.

As stated previously, cultural intelligence is associated with perceived leadership effectiveness and may help leaders navigate different cultural expectations (Sakınç & Ergün, 2024). In today’s professional world it is best to consider not only the workplace’s established workflow, but any cultural expectations that come with the position. For example, an American

manager being transplanted to a new workplace in China may encounter cultural differences in expectations of communication and authority. Meyers (2014) describes American leadership as generally egalitarian, while Chinese workflows tend to be more hierarchical. An American manager may interpret silence as confusion, or disrespect, when the employees may instead be demonstrating respect by staying silent. An effective manager knows how to recognize these cultural differences, and adjust their workflow accordingly.

One limitation of the study done by Sakınç and Ergün (2024) would be that the sample size of the study was too small to make any global conclusions. While the hospitality district does encounter more global wayfarers, the data is valuable, but running the same tests on a global scale would only tighten the arguments. Their findings suggest that cultural intelligence is associated with effective leadership, and more research involving participants from multiple cultural backgrounds would help determine how expectations of authority influence leadership outcomes.

In the workplace it is important to not rely only on psychometric intelligence tests, as they often ignore cultural backgrounds. It is also important to consider what kind of workplace environment you are entering, and what kind of workflow they prefer to use. The best leaders know how to adapt to their team members cognitive style, workflow, and understand how to

maximize production under any cultural lens.



References

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