EXPLORING INTELLIGENCES, ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP IN MUMBAI, INDIA

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Abstract

This article contributes to the research on social intelligence, emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence by examining the perspective of these intelligences in India, as well as providing insights into how they are valued in Indian organizations. Interviews were conducted in Mumbai, India of individuals who previous completed a survey these intelligences, as well as leadership and cultural exposure. These interviews indicate that while Indians understood the survey items in the previous research, they do not clearly distinguish social intelligence and cultural intelligence. Furthermore, while they see these intelligences are generally considered important, they do not appear to be formally utilized in their organizations. While the sample for this study was small, the findings provide some important insight since many organizations are considering assessing and training these intelligences. If perceptions of these vary in India, organizations have to consider how this may impact their assessment and training.

Keywords: Social Intelligence, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, leadership, cultural exposure, intra-country diversity

1. INTRODUCTION

This exploratory study examines Indians' perceptions of social intelligence (SI), emotional intelligence (EI), and cultural intelligence (CQ); their perspective on leadership and the impact on cultural exposure on them. It builds on previous research, which had examined whether Indians were higher on SI, EI, and CQ than U.S. citizens because of the high-context nature of their communication (Crowne, Phatak and Salunkhe, 2009). This past study indicated that U.S. workers were higher on SI and no significant difference was found between Indian and U.S. workers on EI and CQ (Crowne et al., 2009). Which was contrary to what was expected, but supported other research that culture does not influence intelligence (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2002). But the research is not all clear, others have stated that all psychological processes are somewhat culturally embedded (Sharma, Deller, Biswal and Mandal, 2009) and others have suggested that there could be a cultural difference in some forms of intelligence (Ilangovan, Scroggins and Rozeh, 2007). While past studies have quantitatively examined cultural differences by using various statistical techniques (Crowne et al., 2009, Mayer, Salovey, Caruso and Sitarenios, 2003), no study has examined Indian perceptions through qualitative analysis. This approach addresses how the subjects are interpreting the survey items through interviewing them post-survey.

Understanding these intelligences is crucial because leadership skills have been linked to these intelligences (Alon and Higgins, 2005, Caruso, Mayer, Salovey, Riggio, Murphy and Pirozzolo, 2002, Huy, 1999, Kobe, Reiter-Palmon and Rickers, 2001, Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter and Buckley, 2003, Zaccaro, Riggio, Murphy and Pirozzolo, 2002) and furthermore the understanding of the impact of intra-country diversity on these intelligences should provide some insight to managers of multinational organizations who aim to train these skills. Furthermore some have called for managers to recognize that there are potential differences in EI profiles based on cultural backgrounds (Ilangovan et al., 2007). Additionally, since both researchers and practitioners have been interested in training individuals on EI (Ciarrochi and Mayer, 2007, Hays, 1999, Laabs, 1999, Slaski and Cartwright, 2003) and CQ (Earley and Peterson, 2004), this article is timely.

1.1.   Overview of Social Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence and Cultural Intelligence

While each of these intelligences have been defined by many researchers, for the purposes of this article the following definitions are utilized. SI is the "ability to understand and manage people" (Thorndike and Stein, 1937: 275). EI is defined as "the ability to perceive and express emotion accurately and adaptively, the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge, the ability to use feelings to facilitate thought, and the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and in others" (Salovey and Pizarro, 2003: 263). CQ is thought to be the capability to adjust and effectively adapt to diverse cultural situations (Ang, Van Dyne and Koh, 2006, Earley and Ang, 2003, Ng and Earley, 2006) and has been defined "as a *system* of interacting knowledge and skills, linked by cultural metacognition, that allows people to adapt to, select, and shape the cultural aspects of their environment" (Thomas, Elron, Stahl, Ekelund, Ravlin, Cerdin, Poelmans, Brislin, Pekerti, Aycan, Maznevski, Au and Lazarova, 2008: 127).

1.2.   The Importance of Studying India

Recently, a review of human resource management literature focused on India (Pio, 2007) and the ethnic, religious and language diversity in India is well documented (CIA, 2009). Therefore this high level of in-country diversity could have implications on what Indian's considered socially, emotionally and/or culturally intelligent. Furthermore, evidence exists that management of emotions may be based on the principles of karma and Indian's may manage their emotions for the sake of the group (Sharma et al., 2009). Thus their perception of what is considered emotionally intelligent may different than other societies.

In addition, Hofstede classified India as a Power Distance (PDI) ranking of 77 compared to a world average of 56.5, indicating a high level of accepted inequality of power and wealth within the society. On Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), India ranks 40, compared to the world average of 65, which may indicate that the culture may be more open to unstructured ideas and situations. On the Individualism Index, India ranks 48 where the world average is around 50, thus indicating that India is slightly more oriented to a collectivist society (Hofstede, 2003). These cultural dimensions could have the most relevance when studying SI, EI and CQ. For instance, having a high level of Power Distance, which indicates an acceptance of inequality of power and wealth, may create variation in what is considered socially intelligent and appropriate behavior in India, such as whether it is appropriate to question authority. With respect to Uncertainty Avoidance, India being more aware of unstructured situations may be related to the diversity of cultures present and an acceptance of the ambiguity created by not understanding all the nuances of other culture, which may impact their understanding of CQ.

Some have examined SI, EI, and/or CQ in India (Bhattacharya, Dutta and Mandal, 2004, Crowne and Phatak, 2005, Crowne et al., 2009, Ilangovan et al., 2007, Mayer et al., 2003, Pant and Prakash, 2004, Sharma et al., 2009) but none have examined all three constructs in a qualitative manor in India. This research analyzes seven questions:
1. Was the survey previously completed clear to the Indian participants?
2. What skills do their organizations value?
3. What are considered important skills for leadership in Indians?
4. Are SI, EI and CQ skills important for leadership?
5. What is the Indian understanding of SI, EI and CQ?
6. Do Indians value the concepts of SI, EI and CQ in human resource processes?
7. How does an Indians' level of exposure to cultures outside India relate to their perceptions of these intelligences?

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study expands on previous research by Crowne and colleagues (2009) where surveys were completed by 24 individuals enrolled in a professional program in an Indian management institute. In this current study, survey participants from the previous study were contacted by the management institute and asked if they would able to participate in a follow-up interview and 10 agreed (41.7% response rate). In the original survey the average age was 30.88 years and was composed of 19 males (79.2%) (Crowne et al., 2009). Of the 10 interviewees, the average age was 32.1 and 9 participants were male (90%). It should be noted that in the remaining portion of this article all participants are referred using male pronouns for simplicity.

Interviewees came from a variety of industries and 9 of the participants were from international organizations (90%). All interviews were semi-structured and took place in Mumbai, India during a one week period and where scheduled for an hour.

Actual time varied based on the discussion. Participants were first asked to review the survey items again and highlight any terms or wording that did not make sense. Then interviewees were asked questions regarding their organization, such as generally what skills are valued, if the skills associated with SI, EI and CQ were valued. Other questions focused on the value of leadership. Additionally, each was asked if they were involved in various human resource functions and whether these skills were a part of these processes. All interviews were conducted by the same researcher and recorded. After the interviews were complete, they were transcribed by an outside agency. Then transcription was checked for accuracy against the interviews by the researcher who conducted the interviews.

1.3. Analysis of the Interviews

Two authors independently with an ex post method of categorizing responses, thus codes were determined from a review of the transcripts, such as categorizing comments related to the previous survey and each intelligence. Additional categories were created to assess valued organizational skills, leadership, human resource practices and cultural exposure. Within each of these later categories coding and analysis were conducted to see if any of the intelligences appeared present in responses. If it appeared that the phrase addressed multiple intelligences it was subsequently coded as such. Then each author looked for general patterns in the interviews and summarized their findings. Emergent themes were noted and analyses were compared.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Survey Items Assessed in the Previous Survey

In response to Question 1, participants reviewed the items related to SI in the survey and most seemed to understand what the questions were asking. Only two participants did not understand some wording in one item each. One participant acknowledged that he did not know what the word "wishes" meant which is in a SI item. Another, needed elaboration on the meaning of "I reexamine the assumptions of others." All of the participants acknowledged that they understood the terminology used in the EI survey. In regards to the survey items related to CQ, most participants understood the survey items. Only three of the ten interviewed had questions related to what an item meant. Each had only one question. One participant did not understand the question "I alter my facial expressions." Another did not understand the term cultural intelligence and the last was confused about the question regarding understanding economic and legal systems because he was not sure if the question was referring to within India or outside. Few participants made comments around the survey items related to leadership. Only one did not understand a term in the survey, who needed clarification on the phrase "collective mission."

Much of the discussion around the survey items was more related to how the individuals responded to the items. For instance during the discussion of SI, one respondent comment on the item "I have a hard time getting along with others," and stated that this wasn't true. Another commented that they thought that it is difficult to predict other's behaviors. Similarly when discussing EI, many wanted to talk about how they responded to the survey. For instance, one stated, "I'm not a good observer of other's emotions," but he hoped to understand other's emotions and indicated that he wanted to build these skills. Another commented that he encourages himself to try his best in situations.

Other interesting insights unfolded when discussing CQ. For instance, one individual stated it was not necessary to know the legal systems and marriage practices of other countries, so to him this question didn't seem relevant. When referring to the legal systems, he went on to state that they "more or less will be the same" that the "major rules will be common in our countries" and he used the example that it was important not hurt people. Moreover, another stated that it is difficult to know the local shopping conditions unless someone local provides assistance. He noted that in India the "market area is different." Furthermore, three participants acknowledged their lack of awareness about other cultures. One stated that he was not very well exposed to other cultures and thought he "may not notice something" when interacting with others outside his culture, and would not be aware of it.

In summation and in response to Question 1, most of the items were understood by the participants.

3.2 Examining Organizational Skills in Indian Organizations

To determine the answer to Question 2, the individuals were asked what skills are valued in their organizations and Table 1 summarizes the responses. Of these skills listed, people skills can be linked to SI and leadership skills and teamwork are likely outcomes of being socially, emotionally and/or culturally intelligence, but none of these intelligences is specifically mentioned.

Thus, these specific intelligences do not appear to be considered directly at least by name.

TABLE 1: Organizational skills mentioned by workers

Skill	Number of workers who mentioned it	Associated Intelligence
Leadership Skills	4	Social Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence &/Or Cultural Intelligence
Technical Skills	2	
Teamwork	2	Social Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence &/Or Cultural Intelligence
People Skills	1	Social Intelligence
Flexibility	1	
Trust	1	
Transparency & Truthfulness	1	

3.3 The Discussion of Leadership in Indian Organizations

All participants acknowledged that leadership was important, when asked directly, Although, as noted in Table 1 only 4 mentioned it when asked a more general question about organizational skills. Within the discussion on leadership, much of the comments related around social skills and people skills; for instance, one thought good leadership is understanding that one can't deal with two individuals the same way. Another commented that "A good leader…, empathy, good listening skills, lead by example…, teamwork, and use diversity in it's fullest in terms of, you know, even though you are from here or you might be having different people from different backgrounds, social and economic backgrounds…use them properly." Still another stated leadership was important at the management level. One mentioned, "The leaders are actually those who take a bold step…One who motivates the team members, one who maintains discipline and the team and one who directs or guides the people to achieve the certain goal," and that appropriate handling of people was essential. Another believed that everyone in his organization was a leader because they were always working as a team.

Some saw leaders as supportive "…if I'm doing a very good job then always my superiors are there to congratulate me." Another believed when a problem occurs leaders don't come to criticize but rather come to explain how to avoid the mistake in the future. Some saw leadership as the ability to "groom" others. Only two people mentioned different cultures, so CQ seems to be minimal relevant in leadership in the minds of these participants. Furthermore, only one acknowledged that leadership is situational, which seems contrary to the flexibility in actions that is utilized in these intelligences. Therefore in response to Questions 3 and 4, the aspects of SI and EI appeared important for leadership in organizations; because they seem to be implied by participants noting the importance of various social skills and emotional skills. CQ skills appear less important.

3.4 The Importance of Each Intelligence in Indian Organizations

Questions were asked regarding if and how participants saw these intelligences valued in their organizations. Overall, communication and social awareness were discussed as important skills. What was fascinating was that when discussing SI, six of the ten interviewees mentioned the diversity within India. Some of the intriguing comments included one participant stating that "you have people come from different states, as I said different cultures, different backgrounds," and another stating that India is "culturally different, linguistically different, demographically different."

Another agreed by stating that, "All the Indian states have different cultures," and yet another stated that "…they are different people. So you have to handle them very carefully." Some referred to the multitude of languages in India and four people specifically mentioned language skills as critical within India. Some included the differences in religions as important.

The diversity of culture in India has led some to believe that there is a need to be flexible; although it was thought by some that being in India people "more or less" know the Indian culture. One indicated the ability of Indian's to interact effectively in other cultures by stating that "…even though we have people who are from different parts of India, we are from different cultures, we are from different social environments, we're mingling with each other very freely." It appears that to be socially intelligent in India requires awareness of other cultures within India which would be linked to CQ. With respect to EI most felt that dealing with people means understanding feelings and that different people have different emotional needs. One specifically cited the diversity in India and stated, "So, obviously, you can't deal with two individuals the same way. You have to take into consideration their emotional upkeep."

Some of the interviewees saw EI as important in the global economy, for teamwork, decision making and for upper management. Specifically, one stated that EI plays a role in upper management because they need to be skilled at reading non-verbal behaviors. A few seemed to understand that their emotions impacted the organization. One commented that emotions are important for achieving goals. Another thought that "individual character and individual emotions" always play a role in organizations. One commented that it was important for "you have to control your emotions." In a sense this meant to him being professional at work, and the management of one's own emotions would ensure that others don't get hurt. Emotional stability appeared critical when dealing with other people and some expressed the need to understand the underlying reasons for a person's behavior. Some thought that positive emotions were important.

The conversations around CQ were fascinating. Many acknowledge it is important to understand cultural differences and to some geographic differences meant cultural differences. Referring to within India or outside India five people mentioned language being a major barrier in interacting with others and some noted the importance of English. Of the participants, six people mentioned the cultural diversity of India, but some felt the cultural differences helped. One even referred to India as "many countries merged into one." Another commented that he thought "most Indians are brought up in such an environment that they can easily understand and adjust to the circumstances." One noted that when one has to interact with individuals from another culture, he has to be aware of the cultural dos and don'ts. Some expressed a need to be open, the importance of exposure to other cultures and the ability to adapt. Another acknowledged it is important to understand and listen and along the same vein, another commented that "We have to deal with U.S. people, we have to understand their line of thinking." The interviewee stated that they consider the connotations and words used and realized that they are not the same in the U.S. as in Great Britain.

CQ seemed particularly important in social situations. One commented that "You have to break the barriers of your culture," because of the need to mingle with others. Another specifically stated that during social situations cultural issues arise. A few believed it was important to have CQ skills only if the customers/clients were foreign. It was stated that to satisfy a client's need, one has to understand their culture. Thus, while most of them did not have much foreign experience, they seemed confident because they feel that they already have the experience of interacting with diverse people from India. Therefore, in response to Question 5, it appears these intelligences are valued when directly asked about them. Indians understanding of EI seemed in-line with the view of current researchers. Their perspective on SI and CQ was not clear, but the skills associated with each seemed relevant in organizations because of the diversity within India.

3.5 Looking at the Human Resource Practices

When discussing human resource practices in their organizations and whether SI, EI and/or CQ seemed to be important, the personal interview seemed to be most critical and the skills of SI, EI and CQ appeared to be assessed more indirectly. Only one specifically thought they looked at EI and SI, others mentioned areas related skills. For example, two people stated the importance of communication skills and four noted people or social skills.

One individual comment that they look at which culture the individual is from and how well they represented the culture, the interviewers then read through information on the particular culture prior to the interview, which shows the organization was using some of their CQ skills. None of the organizational training was specifically titled SI, EI or CQ training, but some felt that these skills were included. Similar areas mentioned included three people who stated that "soft skills" were trained and two who mentioned personal effectiveness training. Two specifically noted communication skills, one discussed team building skills, and two mentioned leadership skills. Related to CQ, one discussed foreign language training. One organization used their Saturdays to conduct special training cells to develop "personal skills, cultural skills, and social skills."

During promotions a combination of skills were assessed, but there was general agreement that social skills were important. Seven of the interviewees notedSI or EI were consider, but not usually in a formal way. One individual told a story of how he moved up quickly based on his ability to "mingle" and his "cooperative nature." He believed that "If you want to grow, then your mentality will have to be grown, you'll have to think broader. You'll have to think about your colleagues, you'll have to be cooperative with each other, you will have to help them if they are in need and you will have to speak to them." Another thought that social skills were considered important because they impact "not only the external climate but also affect the internal." For CQ, one stated that it was not considered, but another mentioned that it was looked at and specifically talked about it being considered for people getting promoted or going abroad. To summarize, SI, EI and CQ were not utilized formally in any of the HR processes but aspects of each appeared to be valued at some level in organizations. So in response to Question 6, indirectly they appear to be considered.

3.6 The Influence of Cultural Exposure on Perspectives of SI, EI and CQ

While many acknowledged that their exposure to cultures outside of India was limited, they felt it was important to have an understanding of other cultures. Of the ten participants, seven people mentioned they had some level of cultural exposure, but types of cultural exposures have varied from trips abroad to telephone calls and e-mails. Of the seven who noted some type of exposure, three people mentioned only specifically traveling within Asia and two stated that their only really cross-cultural contact is through communication channels such as phone calls and e-mails. In general most of the trips outside of India were brief; usually under one month.

In response to Question 7 exposure to other cultures outside of India is limited, but this does not seem to impact these intelligences. Rather, based on the previous discussions, the high level of diversity within India does seem to contribute to the lack of clarity between SI and CQ and contributed to Indians feeling capable of interacting effectively outside of India.

4. DISCUSSION

While the sample was small and concentrated in only Mumbai, India, the interviews provided some interesting discussion around SI, EI and CQ. The most critical finding is that the concepts of SI and CQ are blended in the minds of Indians. So it may be necessary to investigate this in more detail and determine if how SI and CQ are perceived may vary in cultures that are diverse. This calls into question the previous findings of Crowne and colleagues (2009) that initiated this research study. If the perspective of Indians of SI and CQ is blurred than the past studies findings that U.S. citizens were higher on SI may not be accurate and may be an artifact of this. Moreover the understanding of EI seemed clearer, which may indicate that this concept is clearer in diverse cultures. Table 2 summarizes questions that researchers may want to examine based on the interview findings and the impact of the diversity within India (intra-country diversity).

Table 2: Summary Table of Future Research Questions

Future Research Questions

1. Does intra-country diversity create confusion between social intelligence and cultural intelligence?

2. Does intra-country diversity generate a high level of cultural awareness?

3. Does intra-country diversity aid in the development of higher levels of openness to experience?

Moreover, the minimal exposure to cultures outside of India, experienced by participants appears to create an awareness of their limited cultural knowledge, yet it is not detrimental their cultural awareness. In fact, when combined with their exposure to diversity within India, it generates respect for cultural differences, which is indicted by participants statements regarding how they modify their behavior to accommodate differences, which are all important elements of CQ. Thus it may not be the exposure to other cultures outside ones country of citizenship as some have found (Crowne, 2008), but rather exposure to diverse sub-cultures. Referring back to the earlier discussion of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, it seems likely that Indian's level of Uncertainty Avoidance may have some influence on their perspective of these intelligences. Their openness to unstructured ideas and situations may be a particularly strong influence because it allows them to feel comfortable in various and unique social, emotional and cultural situations.

Finally, this research indicates that Indian's understood the survey used which is important to determine conceptual equivalence, meaning that the words have the same meaning, and functional equivalence, and the terms used are viewed in a similar manor in other cultures (Briscoe, Schuler and Claus, 2009).

From a managerial perspective there are several points that organizations should consider. First, Indian's perspective on SI and CQ appear blurred, so managers should consider how this will impact training. It may be important that in cultures such as India, that the training would be different than in a homogenous culture. Second, Indians seem able to utilize their experiences of living in a diverse culture which may indicate that they will be successful expatriates. Organizations may actually need to train Indian's less to go abroad as expatriates than they may in other cultures. It is also possible that organizations may be able to learn from the perspective of Indians and use them as trainers when it comes to training CQ. Third, Indian organizations do not appear to utilize these intelligences formally. It may be advantageous for managers to consider the value of incorporating evaluation of SI, EI and CQ, since employees note some of the outcomes associated with SI, EI and CQ, such as teamwork and leadership as critical.

This was an exploratory study, thus the findings are limited and should be interpreted with caution. The sample size was quite small, mostly all male and only from Mumbai, India; therefore generalizablity is limited. Although, the participants did represent multiple organizations and cultures; thus, future research should build on this study and remedy these limitations. Additionally, the interview format can lead to some bias, so findings should be interpreted with caution.

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