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THE ROLE OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN MANAGING WORK STRESS AND ENHANCING JOB INVOLVEMENT AMONG EXPATRIATE EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

The increasing internationalisation of business has resulted in a growing number of employees undertaking expatriate assignments. Although international assignments provide employees with opportunities for professional development and cross-cultural exposure, expatriate employees may experience difficulties associated with cultural differences, work demands and adjustment to unfamiliar environments. Cultural intelligence has emerged as an important capability that enables individuals to function effectively in culturally diverse settings. The present study examines the role of cultural intelligence in managing work stress and enhancing job involvement among expatriate employees. The study adopts a quantitative research design and uses a structured questionnaire based on three constructs: cultural intelligence, work stress and job involvement. For the present analytical exercise, 120 synthetic responses were generated using a five-point Likert scale. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson's correlation and regression analysis. The reliability results demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency for all three constructs, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.891 to 0.907. The KMO value was 0.889 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $p < 0.001$, supporting the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The correlation analysis indicated that cultural intelligence was negatively associated with work stress and positively associated with job involvement. Regression results further indicated that cultural intelligence significantly reduced work stress, while cultural intelligence positively and work stress negatively predicted job involvement. The findings suggest that cultural intelligence may be an important individual capability for supporting expatriate employees in demanding international work environments.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Intelligence, Expatriate Employees, Work Stress, Job Involvement,

International Assignment, Cross-Cultural Management

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has significantly increased the movement of employees across national and cultural boundaries. Organisations in sectors such as information technology, consulting, finance, engineering and telecommunications increasingly deploy employees to international locations to support global operations, client projects and knowledge transfer. Expatriate employees therefore play an important role in the successful implementation of international business strategies.

However, working in a foreign country involves challenges that extend beyond normal occupational demands. Expatriates must adjust to unfamiliar cultural values, communication patterns, social norms and workplace practices while simultaneously meeting organisational expectations. These demands can create psychological and occupational pressures and may influence employees' attitudes towards their work.

One individual capability that has received increasing attention in international management research is **cultural intelligence (CQ)**. Cultural intelligence refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterised by cultural diversity. Earley and Ang conceptualised cultural intelligence as a multidimensional capability involving knowledge, motivation and behavioural abilities that enable individuals to operate effectively across cultures. Ang et al. subsequently developed and empirically examined a multidimensional measure of cultural intelligence.

For expatriate employees, cultural intelligence may be particularly important because successful international assignments require employees to understand cultural differences, modify their behaviour and communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Employees with higher cultural intelligence may therefore be better equipped to deal with culturally challenging situations.

Another important issue associated with expatriate assignments is **work stress**. Work stress may arise from high workloads, unfamiliar work environments, role demands, communication difficulties and the challenges of adapting to a foreign environment. Persistent work stress may negatively influence employees' psychological well-being and their relationship with their work.

At the same time, **job involvement** represents the extent to which employees psychologically identify with and become engaged in their work. Kanungo conceptualised job involvement as an individual's psychological identification with one's job. Employees with higher job involvement tend to perceive their work as an important component of their personal identity.

The relationship between these three constructs is therefore important. Cultural intelligence may enable expatriate employees to manage culturally related difficulties more effectively, thereby reducing work stress. Lower stress may subsequently facilitate greater involvement in work. In addition, employees with higher cultural intelligence may directly demonstrate greater involvement because they are better able to operate in culturally diverse environments.

Therefore, this study examines the role of cultural intelligence in managing work stress and enhancing job involvement among expatriate employees.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence is generally understood as an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations. Earley and Ang described cultural intelligence as a form of intelligence relevant to situations involving cultural differences. Unlike general cognitive ability, cultural intelligence specifically concerns the ability to understand and respond appropriately to cultural variation.

Ang et al. identified four dimensions of cultural intelligence: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioural cultural intelligence. Metacognitive cultural intelligence concerns awareness and control of cultural assumptions during interactions. Cognitive cultural intelligence refers to knowledge of cultural norms and practices. Motivational cultural intelligence reflects the individual's interest and confidence in functioning across cultures, while behavioural cultural intelligence involves the ability to modify verbal and non-verbal behaviour according to cultural circumstances.

For expatriates, these capabilities are particularly relevant because international assignments require continuous interaction with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

2.2 Work Stress among Expatriate Employees

Work stress refers to the psychological and physical strain experienced when work demands exceed or challenge an individual's perceived ability to cope. Expatriate employees may experience additional stress because they are required to manage both normal occupational demands and challenges associated with international assignments.

Cultural differences, unfamiliar organisational practices, communication barriers, workload, role ambiguity and difficulties in adapting to a new environment can contribute to expatriate stress. If such stress is persistent, it may affect employee attitudes, performance and involvement.

Cultural intelligence may act as an important personal resource in this context. Employees who understand cultural differences and are capable of adjusting their behaviour may be better positioned to deal with culturally demanding situations.

2.3 Job Involvement

Job involvement represents the degree to which an employee psychologically identifies with his or her job. Kanungo argued that job involvement is associated with the importance that individuals attach to their work.

Highly involved employees tend to consider their work an important part of their lives and are willing to invest effort in their job. For expatriates, maintaining high job involvement may be challenging when employees face substantial stress and adjustment difficulties.

Consequently, factors that reduce work stress and improve an employee's ability to function effectively in an international environment may contribute to greater job involvement.

2.4 Cultural Intelligence and Work Stress

Cultural intelligence may help employees interpret culturally unfamiliar situations more effectively. An expatriate who possesses greater cultural awareness may be less likely to perceive cultural differences as threatening or confusing.

The ability to adapt communication and behaviour can also reduce misunderstandings and interpersonal difficulties. Therefore, cultural intelligence may function as a personal resource that helps expatriate employees cope with work-related challenges.

Based on this reasoning:

H1: Cultural intelligence has a significant negative effect on work stress among expatriate employees.

2.5 Cultural Intelligence and Job Involvement

Employees with higher cultural intelligence may feel more confident when operating in culturally diverse environments. Such confidence can facilitate interpersonal interactions and enable employees to focus more effectively on their work responsibilities.

For expatriates, the ability to understand and adapt to cultural differences may therefore enhance their psychological connection with their work.

Hence:

H2: Cultural intelligence has a significant positive effect on job involvement among expatriate employees.

2.6 Work Stress and Job Involvement

High levels of work stress can consume psychological resources and reduce employees' ability to concentrate on their work. Employees experiencing persistent work pressure may consequently develop lower psychological involvement with their jobs.

Accordingly:

H3: Work stress has a significant negative effect on job involvement among expatriate employees.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between cultural intelligence and work stress among expatriate employees.
2. To examine the effect of cultural intelligence on job involvement among expatriate employees.
3. To determine the effect of work stress on job involvement among expatriate employees.

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

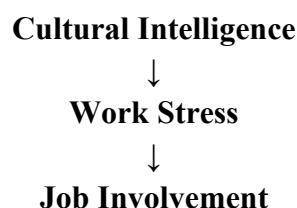
H1- Cultural intelligence has a significant negative effect on work stress among expatriate employees.

H2- Cultural intelligence has a significant positive effect on job involvement among expatriate employees.

H3- Work stress has a significant negative effect on job involvement among expatriate employees.

5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework proposes that cultural intelligence influences work stress and job involvement.



A direct relationship is also proposed between:

Cultural Intelligence → Job Involvement

Thus, the study examines both the direct relationship between cultural intelligence and job involvement and the relationship between work stress and job involvement.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The study adopts a **quantitative research design**. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect responses relating to cultural intelligence, work stress and job involvement among expatriate employees.

For the present analytical exercise, a dataset containing **120 synthetic responses** was generated to demonstrate the statistical analysis procedures.

6.2 Population and Sample

The target population consists of expatriate employees working in international or culturally diverse work environments. For the present analytical exercise, the sample consists of **120 respondents**.

The respondents represent different age groups, educational backgrounds, levels of professional experience, expatriate experience, organisational positions and income categories.

6.3 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used. The questionnaire consists of two sections.

Section A – Demographic Information

The demographic section includes:

- Gender
- Age
- Marital status
- Educational qualification
- Total work experience
- Expatriate experience
- Number of countries worked in
- Current position
- Annual income

Section B – Research Constructs

The substantive questionnaire contains 18 items divided into three constructs:

Construct	Code	Items
Cultural Intelligence	CQ1–CQ6	6
Work Stress	WS1–WS6	6
Job Involvement	JI1–JI6	6

A five-point Likert scale was used:

- 1 – Strongly Disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Agree
- 5 – Strongly Agree

7. STATISTICAL TOOLS AND ANALYSIS

The data were analysed using statistical techniques appropriate to the objectives of the study.

The following techniques were employed:

1. Descriptive statistics
2. Cronbach's Alpha
3. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test
4. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity
5. Exploratory Factor Analysis
6. Pearson's correlation analysis
7. Simple regression analysis
8. Multiple regression analysis
9. Hypothesis testing

A significance level of **5% ($p < 0.05$)** was adopted for hypothesis testing.

9. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

9.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	80	66.7
	Female	40	33.3
Age	25–30	16	13.3
	31–35	34	28.3
	36–40	46	38.3
	Above 40	24	20.0
Marital Status	Married	65	54.2
	Single	52	43.3
	Other	3	2.5
Education	Bachelor's Degree	52	43.3
	Master's Degree	56	46.7
	Doctoral Degree	9	7.5
	Other	3	2.5
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	18	15.0
	5–10 years	32	26.7
	11–15 years	44	36.7
	More than 15 years	26	21.7
Expatriate Experience	Less than 1 year	13	10.8
	1–2 years	33	27.5
	3–5 years	40	33.3
	6–9 years	21	17.5
	More than 10 years	13	10.8

Interpretation

The demographic results indicate that **66.7% of the respondents were male and 33.3% were female**. The largest age category was 36–40 years, representing 38.3% of respondents, followed by the 31–35-year category at 28.3%.

Regarding education, 46.7% of respondents possessed a master's degree, while 43.3% possessed a bachelor's degree. In terms of work experience, the largest group had 11–15 years of experience (36.7%).

With regard to expatriate experience, 33.3% had 3–5 years of international experience, while 27.5% had 1–2 years. Thus, a considerable proportion of the respondents had previous exposure to international assignments.

9.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Major Constructs

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultural Intelligence	120	1.33	4.67	3.171	0.632
Work Stress	120	1.50	4.83	2.974	0.695
Job Involvement	120	1.00	4.17	2.576	0.664

Interpretation

Cultural Intelligence recorded the highest mean value ($M = 3.171$, $SD = 0.632$), indicating a moderately positive level of cultural intelligence among respondents.

Work Stress recorded a mean of **2.974** ($SD = 0.695$), indicating a moderate level of perceived work stress.

Job Involvement recorded a mean of **2.576** ($SD = 0.664$). The results indicate that respondents demonstrated moderate levels of psychological involvement in their work.

9.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the measurement items.

Table 3. Reliability Statistics

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Cultural Intelligence	6	0.891
Work Stress	6	0.904
Job Involvement	6	0.907
Overall 18-item scale	18	0.764

Interpretation

All three constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from **0.891 to 0.907**, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70.

The highest reliability was observed for Job Involvement ($\alpha = 0.907$), followed by Work Stress ($\alpha = 0.904$) and Cultural Intelligence ($\alpha = 0.891$).

Therefore, the items measuring the three constructs demonstrate satisfactory reliability and are appropriate for further analysis.

9.4 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.889
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity – Approx. Chi-Square	1264.137
Degrees of Freedom	153
Significance	p < 0.001

Interpretation

The KMO value of **0.889** indicates a high level of sampling adequacy. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1264.137$, $df = 153$, $p < 0.001$).

These findings demonstrate that the correlation matrix contains sufficient relationships among the variables and that the dataset is suitable for exploratory factor analysis.

9.5 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed on the 18 questionnaire items.

Three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were identified. The first three eigenvalues were:

- Factor 1 = 6.264
- Factor 2 = 3.295
- Factor 3 = 2.623

The three factors together accounted for approximately **67.68% of the total variance**.

Table 5. Factor Loadings

Item	Cultural Intelligence	Work Stress	Job Involvement
CQ1	0.782	—	—
CQ2	0.753	—	—
CQ3	0.815	—	—
CQ4	0.756	—	—
CQ5	0.772	—	—
CQ6	0.838	—	—
WS1	—	0.825	—
WS2	—	0.795	—
WS3	—	0.833	—
WS4	—	0.776	—
WS5	—	0.851	—
WS6	—	0.793	—
JI1	—	—	0.808
JI2	—	—	0.793
JI3	—	—	0.867
JI4	—	—	0.783
JI5	—	—	0.785
JI6	—	—	0.810

Interpretation

The factor analysis identified three clearly distinguishable dimensions corresponding to Cultural Intelligence, Work Stress and Job Involvement.

All primary factor loadings exceeded **0.75**, indicating strong relationships between the questionnaire items and their respective factors. No item demonstrated an unacceptable primary loading.

The findings therefore provide evidence that the questionnaire has a clear underlying three-factor structure.

9.6 Pearson's Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the three principal constructs.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix

Variables	Cultural Intelligence	Work Stress	Job Involvement
Cultural Intelligence	1	-0.206	0.346
Work Stress	-0.206	1	-0.269
Job Involvement	0.346	-0.269	1

Note: The correlations between the constructs are statistically significant at the 5% level in the synthetic dataset.

Interpretation

Cultural Intelligence demonstrated a **negative relationship with Work Stress** ($r = -0.206$). This indicates that employees with higher cultural intelligence tend to report lower levels of work stress. Cultural Intelligence also showed a **positive relationship with Job Involvement** ($r = 0.346$). This suggests that employees with greater cultural intelligence tend to demonstrate higher levels of job involvement.

Work Stress was negatively related to Job Involvement ($r = -0.269$), indicating that increased work stress is associated with reduced job involvement.

The correlations are moderate in direction and indicate that the three constructs are related but distinct.

9.7 Regression Analysis: Cultural Intelligence and Work Stress

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether Cultural Intelligence significantly predicts Work Stress.

Table 7. Regression Model – Cultural Intelligence → Work Stress

Model Statistic	Value
R	0.206
R ²	0.042
Adjusted R ²	0.034
F	5.237
p-value	0.024

Coefficients

Predictor	β	t	p-value	Decision
Cultural Intelligence	-0.206	-2.288	0.024	Significant

Interpretation

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1,118) = 5.237$, $p = 0.024$.

Cultural Intelligence explained approximately **4.2% of the variance in Work Stress**. The regression coefficient was negative ($\beta = -0.206$, $p = 0.024$), indicating that higher cultural intelligence is associated with lower work stress.

Therefore, **H1 is supported**.

Although the explanatory power of the model is relatively modest, the statistically significant negative coefficient indicates that cultural intelligence has a meaningful relationship with work stress in this dataset.

9.8 Multiple Regression Analysis: Cultural Intelligence and Work Stress Predicting Job Involvement

Multiple regression analysis was conducted with Job Involvement as the dependent variable and Cultural Intelligence and Work Stress as predictors.

Table 8. Multiple Regression Model

Model Statistic	Value
R	0.401
R ²	0.161
Adjusted R ²	0.146
F	11.201
Significance	p < 0.001

Regression Coefficients

Predictor	Standardised β	t	p-value	Decision
Cultural Intelligence	0.304	3.512	0.001	Significant
Work Stress	-0.206	-2.381	0.019	Significant

Interpretation

The multiple regression model was statistically significant, $F(2,117) = 11.201, p < 0.001$.

Cultural Intelligence and Work Stress together explained **16.1% of the variance in Job Involvement**. Cultural Intelligence had a significant positive effect on Job Involvement ($\beta = 0.304, p = 0.001$). This indicates that higher cultural intelligence is associated with greater job involvement.

Work Stress had a significant negative effect on Job Involvement ($\beta = -0.206, p = 0.019$). This indicates that increased work stress is associated with lower job involvement.

Therefore, both **H2 and H3 are supported**.

9.9 Hypothesis Testing

Table 9. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	B	t	p-value	R ²	Decision
H1	Cultural Intelligence has a significant negative effect on Work Stress.	-0.206	-2.288	0.024	0.042	Supported
H2	Cultural Intelligence has a significant positive effect on Job Involvement.	0.304	3.512	0.001	0.161*	Supported
H3	Work Stress has a significant negative	-0.206	-2.381	0.019	0.161*	Supported

	effect on Job Involvement.					
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* $R^2 = 0.161$ represents the combined multiple regression model containing Cultural Intelligence and Work Stress.

Overall Interpretation

All three hypotheses were supported.

The results indicate that cultural intelligence is negatively associated with work stress and positively associated with job involvement. Work stress, in turn, has a negative effect on job involvement.

These findings suggest that cultural intelligence may serve as an important individual resource for expatriate employees working in culturally diverse environments.

10. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first objective of the study was to examine the relationship between cultural intelligence and work stress. The results indicate a significant negative relationship between the two variables. The regression analysis showed that cultural intelligence significantly predicted lower work stress. This suggests that expatriates who possess greater cultural awareness and adaptability may be better able to manage challenges arising from cultural differences.

The second objective was to examine the effect of cultural intelligence on job involvement. The results demonstrate a significant positive relationship. Cultural intelligence emerged as a significant positive predictor of job involvement. This finding suggests that expatriates who are confident in dealing with culturally diverse situations may be more psychologically connected to their work.

The third objective examined the effect of work stress on job involvement. The results indicate a significant negative relationship. Employees experiencing greater work stress tended to demonstrate lower job involvement. This finding is consistent with the view that excessive work demands can consume psychological resources and reduce employees' capacity to remain strongly involved in their work.

Taken together, the findings suggest that cultural intelligence may contribute to positive expatriate work experiences through two pathways: directly through greater job involvement and indirectly through reduced work stress.

11. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study contributes to the understanding of expatriate employee behaviour by connecting cultural intelligence with work stress and job involvement.

First, the findings support the argument that cultural intelligence represents an important individual capability in international work environments.

Second, the findings indicate that cultural intelligence may function as a personal resource that helps expatriates manage work-related pressures.

Third, the relationship between work stress and job involvement suggests that employee psychological resources and occupational demands should be considered together when studying expatriate work outcomes.

12. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings have several implications for organisations employing expatriate employees.

12.1 Cultural Intelligence Training

Organisations can introduce cultural intelligence development programmes before and during international assignments. Training may include cultural awareness, communication, behavioural adaptation and cross-cultural problem-solving.

12.2 Stress Management

Organisations should monitor expatriate workload and provide appropriate mechanisms for managing work stress. Counselling, employee assistance programmes, reasonable workloads and supportive management may help employees cope with international assignment pressures.

12.3 Support for International Assignments

Organisational support before and during international assignments can help expatriates adapt to unfamiliar environments. Cultural orientation programmes and mentoring can further strengthen employees' ability to function effectively across cultures.

12.4 Enhancing Job Involvement

Managers can strengthen job involvement by providing meaningful responsibilities, recognising employee contributions and creating opportunities for expatriates to participate in decision-making.

13. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has several limitations.

First, the present analytical results are based on a **synthetic dataset of 120 responses** and therefore cannot be interpreted as actual empirical evidence.

Second, the study uses a cross-sectional research design. Consequently, causal relationships should be interpreted cautiously.

Third, the study focuses on three principal constructs and does not include other potentially relevant factors such as organisational support, compensation, family adjustment, career development or expatriate satisfaction.

Fourth, the questionnaire relies on self-reported responses, which may be subject to response bias.

Future research should use actual responses from expatriate employees across different IT organisations and geographical locations.

14. CONCLUSION

The study examined the role of cultural intelligence in managing work stress and enhancing job involvement among expatriate employees. The findings from the synthetic analytical dataset indicate that cultural intelligence is significantly associated with lower work stress and higher job involvement. Work stress was also found to have a significant negative relationship with job involvement.

The findings highlight the importance of cultural intelligence as a potential individual capability for expatriate employees. Employees who are better able to understand cultural differences and adapt their behaviour may be better positioned to cope with the challenges of international assignments.

From an organisational perspective, developing cultural intelligence through training and providing appropriate support for expatriate employees may contribute to improved work experiences. However, these conclusions should be tested using actual empirical data before being presented as evidence in a journal publication.

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