

Cultural Intelligence in the Study of Intelligence

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Cultural Intelligence in the Study of Intelligence

Abstract

Intelligence officers often interact in culturally diverse settings different from the settings in which they grew up. Yet, there is a lack of academic research about the integration of culture and the study of intelligence. Researchers have made Cultural Intelligence (CQ) measurable via the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) and successfully applied it in the business world as a predictor of success in multi-cultural environments. This article describes an application of the CQS, using the Observer Report questionnaire to assess the memoirs of three successful intelligence officers to ascertain the degree that CQ applies to the success of officers in United States Intelligence Community (USIC) in multicultural environments. The study results indicated each intelligence officer possessed a high degree of cultural intelligence that assisted in the course of their duties and the CQS is a good assessment tool to measure cultural intelligence.

Keywords: Cultural intelligence, Cultural Intelligence Scale, CQS, Cultural Intelligence Quotient

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Introduction

One of the purposes of the United States Intelligence Community (IC) is to collect, interpret, and process raw information into intelligence for use by various policy and decision makers.¹ A nation with interests abroad must work in foreign environments distinct from its domestic culture, necessitating a level of cultural aptitude. In the same way that people have innate emotional intelligence or social intelligence, they also have levels of cultural intelligence, defined as someone's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings.² Intelligence officers abroad are operating in diverse cultural environments, interacting with people, systems, and customs different from those most likely in which they grew up. Analysts and consumers of intelligence reports in their home country also interpret intelligence through their ethnocentric lens and biases. High degrees of cultural intelligence facilitate deeper insights, learning, and performance in culturally diverse environments.³ A lack of cultural intelligence can lead to inefficiency and can have consequences. For example, when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) parachuted teams of paramilitary officers into North Korea during the Korean War, it was hoping for the same successes as the Jedburgh teams of World War II.⁴ While the Jedburgh teams enjoyed cultural similarities to their host nations, the teams inserted into North Korea did not. Consequently, thousands of intelligence operatives lost their lives when they were sent across enemy lines and never heard from again due to a fundamental misunderstanding of communist methods of cultural control in the villages of North Korea.⁵

Cultural intelligence is measurable through the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), a series of statements designed to address four aspects (motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral) of cultural intelligence and measure each aspect on a numerical scale, with an aggregate score providing an overall measure of cultural intelligence.⁶ The purpose of this qualitative case study was to assess the cultural intelligence of US intelligence officers by applying the CQS Observer Report to a sample of officers' autobiographies. The results of the assessment were evaluated to determine the extent to which CQS might be an effective indicator of an intelligence officer's ability to navigate culturally diverse situations. The research question was, to what extent is the CQS an effective indicator of an intelligence officer's success in

culturally diverse situations? To answer the research question, the primary author conducted an analysis of the memoirs of three intelligence officers generally considered successful by members of the USIC: Barry Broman of the CIA, Samuel Faddis of the CIA, and Oleg Kalugin formerly of the Soviet Union's premiere foreign intelligence agency, the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (KGB), using the CQS Observer Report to evaluate each officer's cultural intelligence.⁷ The foundation for the research rested on the theory of cultural intelligence that posits an individual's capability to interact in a culturally appropriate manner is dependent on his or her ability to manage interactions across the four aspects of cultural intelligence.⁸ The thesis for this research is, Cultural intelligence, derived from the field of cultural anthropology and successfully applied to a wide variety of interdisciplinary subjects, is an asset to intelligence officers interacting with foreign cultures. Lack of cultural intelligence can lead to varying degrees of failure, from fundamental misinterpretation of data to loss of life. The article proceeds in the following manner: the literature review, followed by the methodology, data analysis and findings, and recommendations.

Literature Review

A Background in Anthropology

The manner in which people behave in culturally diverse environments is relative to their Cultural Intelligence Quotient (CQ), defined as an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings and is analogous to similar measures of intelligence such as emotional intelligence and social intelligence.⁹ In 2008, a team of researchers defined CQ further by identifying four key aspects: Motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral.¹⁰ Motivational CQ reflects an individual's willingness to devote time and energy to learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural difference. Cognitive CQ regards base knowledge of facts, norms and practices of a given culture derived from personal experience and education. Metacognitive CQ regards the mental processes individuals use to gain and process cultural knowledge, including monitoring their thought process regarding how they perceive culture. People with a high degree of metacognitive CQ are consciously aware of other's cultural preferences from start to finish in a multicultural interaction and seek to constantly

refine and adjust mental models of that culture.¹¹ Behavioral CQ encompass their capability to act and speak appropriately in culturally diverse settings.¹²

Based on three dimensions intercultural success against a numeric scale, the CQS enables CQ measurement. The three aspects of the scale are cultural judgement, cultural adaption, and task performance in cultural settings.¹³ Researchers have found a variety of applications of the CQS as an indicator of multicultural success across a broad range of disciplines. People with high levels of CQ generally are better travelers, function at a higher capacity while traveling, are usually better industry leaders, and are generally better global strategic leaders.¹⁴

Interdisciplinary Anthropology in Other Social Sciences

The applications of cultural anthropology have done much for other academic disciplines, with terms such as ethnocentrism and culture infiltrating the lexicon of most social sciences and offering valuable insights on social perception. The study of cultural anthropology is useful in understanding the importance of culture. Immediately relevant to the study of strategic intelligence is the concept of ethnocentrism, the implicit evaluation of a culture different from an individual's, according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of that one's own's culture. Values, perception, and information are each influenced by ethnocentrism, and often present in the form of cultural bias.¹⁵ A byproduct of cultural bias is the creation of the *other*, a value judgement levied upon a foreign culture that inhibits understanding and often subordinates the foreign culture to a lower position on a social hierarchy.¹⁶ The implication is that people behave and perceive differently in culturally diverse environments.

Examples of the application of cultural anthropology illustrate the importance and impact that culture has in strategic settings. General Petraeus' understanding and implementation of cultural intelligence via a counterinsurgency campaign in the Iraq War successfully decreased violence in the conflict, significantly reducing the number of annual civilian deaths from 23,333 killed in 2007 to 1,600 by the end of 2011.¹⁷ Ken Booth's idea of strategic culture is the belief that a nation and group can often prescribe and predict its behavior through a certain national

lens of culture is another successful application of cultural anthropology.¹⁸ Strategic culture has since been used to interpret North Korea's outlook on threat perception and subsequent development of nuclear weapons and China's nearly millennia long genealogy of strategic culture that it still enacts.¹⁹

A Gap Between Strategic Intelligence and Cultural Anthropology

Despite cultural anthropology enjoying a broad variety of use in other social sciences, it has yet to have a meaningful impact on the study of intelligence—there is a gap between the study of strategic intelligence and cultural anthropology. This is partly due to the study of intelligence largely stemming from the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the CIA during World War II, and its tendency to recruit from east coast universities.²⁰ Following the war, these academics-turned-intelligence-officers returned to academia and brought with them their experiences, thus creating the study of intelligence.²¹ Additionally, the CIA actively supports the study of intelligence by regularly declassifying documents for the express purpose of academic study.²² While the CIA was the first intelligence agency to do so, other international agencies that have since followed suite tend to originate from Western Europe containing Western viewpoints.²³ So while cultural anthropology attempts largely to encompass global perspectives, the study of intelligence is mired in what Aldrich and Kasuku called a Western myopia, limiting the study of intelligence in pre-conceived notions of what intelligence can and cannot be.²⁴ By way of example, Aldrich and Kasuku point to the People's Republic of China's approach toward information as intelligence and most Chinese entities abroad as a collectors, as well as South Africa's use of intelligence to bolster domestic social programs as different cultural paradigms for intelligence.²⁵ These cases alone make it clear that there are different perspectives and approaches to intelligence than in main-stream circulation in the West.

Since then, this Western myopia has hindered the US in its national policy efforts. Anthony Lewis identifies the lack of cultural understanding as one of the reasons the United States lost the Vietnam War.²⁶ Lewis also asserts that classical misunderstandings of Vietnamese society and American ethnocentrism damaged South Vietnamese efforts to stand up their government based in democracy.²⁷ While Americans assumed the

base of Vietnamese culture to be religion and the government as it is in the US, Lewis understood the Vietnamese to have basis in ethics on the concept of *The Village*, from where, along with some strong Confucian background, many Vietnamese social mores derive from.²⁸ Americans projected their ethnocentric values of religion in the form of the Catholic Ngo Diem and ignored his rampant corruption and inability to lead. Additionally, Americans leveraged Diem to institute government from the top down. Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese went straight to the cultural base of power, the village, attempting control from the bottom up.²⁹ The result was an ineffectual effort on the part of the Americans and a calculated, efficient one on the part of the North Vietnamese. Following the 9/11 attacks, United States intelligence reform became a major topic of discussion, yet absent from that discussion was the role of culture. Hamrah argued for several tools to assess what role, if any, organizational culture had in the failure to predict the 9/11 attacks and offered a series of guided questions designed to assist the USIC in the intentional design and creation of a functional organizational culture.³⁰

While Aldrich, Hamrah, and Lewis all introduce cultural anthropology, or aspects of culture for the study of intelligence, each illuminates the gap between the study of intelligence and the study of culture. Each author recommended further integration of their research and identified culture clearly as a missing link. Hamrah called for the further study of the internal culture of the intelligence community while Aldrich and Kasuku, and Lewis each recommended greater interdisciplinary efforts between anthropology and intelligence.³¹ The concept and terminology of CQ is nearly absent from the USIC. Despite having published a literature review in 2005 identifying the importance and relevance of Ang's and Van Dyne's work on CQ, the CIA has not officially embraced the concept of CQ; instead it recommended the work as a break from other books on an intelligence officer's bookshelf.³² In 2015, a master's thesis used the CQS to evaluate the CQ of the Operation JAWBREAKER team to demonstrate that CQ is an integral factor in a successful covert action operation in contrast to characteristics of intelligence officers.³³ Beyond these two sources there is a scarcity of literature indicating the application of CQ in the USIC.

Methodology

Overview and Case Selection

This qualitative case study used Ang's and Van Dyne's Cultural Intelligence Observer statements and scale to assess the CQ of three intelligence officers.³⁴ The number of case studies selected considered the time available to conduct the research during an 8-week master's course. The primary researcher determined criteria for the cases to consider.³⁵ The criteria used for case selection included regular action and interaction in multicultural environments, employment with and for a state intelligence organization, and ease of accessibility to the autobiographies. The primary researcher selected each intelligence officer based on the above criteria and having read and studied the autobiographies, and by determining each officer spent time spent in multicultural environments. Within the USIC, fellow officers and managers admire each of the intelligence officers selected for this research. The officers grew up primarily in the West and share an occupation as intelligence officers with overseas experience. Each notably hails from a different background, with one officer serving in the KGB before his eventual defection to the West while the other two worked in the United States before their tours abroad as CIA case officers.

Oleg Kalugin began as a KGB case officer, adroitly running operatives on behalf of the Soviet Union for years on US soil before he eventually defected to the West.³⁶ Barry Broman successfully ran intelligence operations in South East Asia with the CIA for nearly two decades, including serving as the Chief of Station in a prominent country there.³⁷ Sam Faddis (CIA) inserted into Northern Iraq prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and organized Kurdish forces on the Iraq-Turkey border into a fighting force and successfully waged a guerrilla war once the invasion began.³⁸ Through assessing these three intelligence officers by applying the CQS Observer Report statements, the researchers developed a baseline for use in follow on studies of officers within the USIC.

Assessment Strategy

Following case study selection and reading each autobiography, the primary researcher applied the CQS to code and score responses to the

statements. The CQS Observer Report consists of 20 statements divided into four categories reflecting the four dimensions of CQ: Motivational, cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioral.³⁹ Using a scale from one to seven, with a score of one representing the observer strongly disagrees the subject displays the evaluated tendency, the researcher assessed each statement. In contrast, a score of seven indicates the observer strongly agrees the subject shows the evaluated tendency. The primary researcher looked for statements, or a series of statements that represented and indicated each author's thoughts on each CQ dimension, and qualitatively assigned a score along the CQ scale for 16 of 20 statements because four statements required face to face assessments, which the primary researcher could not make based on reading and studying autobiographies. For example, when Broman was accidentally served a cockroach in a bowl of noodles while first acclimating to Thai culture, he carefully evaluated the situation in terms of culture in a deliberate effort not to commit a social *faux pas*.⁴⁰ In addition, he recalled that Thai sometimes eat other fried insects as a delicacy and politely asked his Thai host whether it was part of the dish.⁴¹ Since the cockroach was not supposed to be part of the dish, Broman displayed strong metacognitive tendencies, as he demonstrated thinking about culture, and successfully navigated the multicultural interaction without offending his hosts. Broman's behavior in this example is consistent with a score of seven for statement four in the metacognitive section of the CQS; "this person checks the accuracy of his cultural knowledge as he interacts with people from different cultures."⁴²

After individual statement scoring, the scores were averaged, by CQ aspect, as opposed to a summation of total points, because it was unfeasible to assess certain statements as an evaluator using autobiographies. For example, a researcher cannot assess behavioral statement two, "this person uses pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations" based on reading alone.⁴³ Normally, a researcher would conduct an in-person interview to make that assessment. However, since the research was part of a master's course project with a short course duration, the researcher used autobiographies as proxies for in-person interviews.

On aspects such as behavior, where the researcher could not attribute a score, the CQ statement was omitted from scoring and analysis so as not

to affect the average. The researcher excluded behavioral statements one through four due to the inability to evaluate these statements using the autobiographies. However, sufficient evidence in the autobiographies facilitated an evaluation of behavioral statement five regarding facial cues when authors wrote about the faces they made or significant reactions they expressed in multicultural interactions. Notwithstanding the numerical value assigned to the evaluation of each sample's CQS the nature of the evaluation remains qualitative due to the method of evaluation. The researcher experienced few issues evaluating the autobiographies, but recommends that subsequent studies attempt in person interviews to collect data more accurately and avoid author bias.

Limitations and Biases

All research contains limitations and biases. Limitations are a result of the types and sources of historical documents, lack of access to study subjects, small sample sizes, sampling bias, incorrect assumption, and human error such as incorrect data interpretation, measurement, and coding. Researchers also have cognitive biases that could inadvertently affect interpretation. For example, the study subjects did not write their autobiographies with CQS interpretation in mind, which may have led to missed mis-coding and subsequent incorrect analysis. To minimize limitations and biases, the primary researcher took precautions to validate authenticity and triangulate data checking additional sources as needed.

Based on the qualitative method of inquiry and case study format, generalizing the research findings to the larger population is a known limitation of this research. This was an additional reason for the inclusion of three study subjects as cases. Finally, the researcher mitigated limitations and bias throughout the research process to boost the reliability and accuracy of the findings.

Analysis and Findings

Overall analysis revealed each of the officers studied possessed high degrees of cultural intelligence in the categories studied. With each statement scored from one to seven, then averaged by CQ Aspect, averages appear high across the sample. It is likely the subjects' written

accounts of their actions demonstrates higher cultural intelligence than might be observed had an interview taken place due to the reflection and editing process an author typically undergoes when publishing a book. Table 1 presents the summary results.

Table 1: Summary Assessment

CQ Aspect	Statement	Broman	Faddis	Kalugin
Motivational	This person truly enjoys interacting with people from different cultures.	7.00	5.40	6.40
Cognitive	This person can describe different ways to motivate and reward people across cultures.	6.50	6.00	6.17
Metacognitive	This person adjusts their understanding of a culture while interacting with people from that culture.	7.00	7.00	6.75
Behavioral	This person modifies how close or far apart they stand when interacting with people from different cultures.	6.00	6.00	6.00
Average		6.63	6.10	6.33

Note: Data compiled by researcher during analysis based on the CQ scoring scale from CQS Observer Report. Each of the CQ Aspect scores is an average. Statement terminology provided by Dr. Linn Van Dyne and used with permission (email, January 11, 2022).

Broman scored high across motivational cultural intelligence given that he went on to start a tourism company in the countries he served while working for the CIA. While Broman scored similarly to the other officers evaluated in the study on cognitive cultural intelligence, he was either uncomfortable using foreign languages regularly or chose not to, despite having a solid foundation in Thai.⁴⁴ Throughout his memoir, Broman displayed strong metacognitive tendencies, which is to say at several points revealed he was thinking about thinking about culture. Notable examples include his discussions on the ex-patriot community in South East Asia and the community's tendency to love its country of origin, but felt compelled to stay abroad despite his analysis of Thai royalty.⁴⁵ Throughout Borman's autobiography, he displayed a strong affection for living abroad and interacting with different cultures.⁴⁶ Compositely, Broman showed the strongest signs of cultural intelligence of the three cases.

Faddis scored lowest on the CQS with a composite average of 6.10. His score, however, suggests a potential gap in applying the CQS to paramilitary officers. By most measures, Faddis succeeded in his task of inserting himself into Northern Iraq ahead of the United States' invasion, organizing an alliance of Kurdish led forces backed by international allies, and leading the Kurdish forces during the invasion to capture the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.⁴⁷ While Faddis gave strong evidence for cognitive and metacognitive cultural intelligence, exemplified by his adroit management of the Turkish-Kurdish tensions, he did not want to stay in Iraq for extended periods of time. While the CQS might indicate this is a lack of cultural intelligence it is more than likely because Faddis was fighting a war and war is physically and emotionally demanding. In many other aspects his high degree of cultural intelligence is clear.⁴⁸

Kalugin, a former highly decorated KGB officer who eventually defected to the United States, also scored highly on the CQS with an average of 6.33. However, if Kalugin's motivational and behavioral cultural intelligence were higher it was not apparent in his autobiography. Kalugin made multiple references to his appreciation of American culture, indicating high levels of cognitive and metacognitive cultural intelligence.⁴⁹ While he expressed that the United States was a much more convenient and wealthy country than the Soviet Union, it is also clear that his ultimate allegiance and desires fell to Russia and his choice to defect to the United States was likely because he was forced rather than choosing to live abroad.⁵⁰

Cumulatively, the case studies provide compelling evidence that the CQS is an effective predictor of an intelligence officer's success in multi-cultural environments. The case studies provided an association between a high degree of cultural intelligence and success in multi-cultural environments—albeit not necessarily intelligence operations. The implication is that the cultural intelligence helped these officers navigate the cultural complexity of the intelligence operation at a minimum, with likely positive impact on the intelligence operation, at best.

Conclusion

The literature review revealed a gap between anthropology and

intelligence studies not only in this research but also measured by the dearth of academic literature addressing the two disciplines, cultural intelligence has yet to be sufficiently associated with the academic study of strategic security and the USIC. This research narrows that gap by formally introducing the theory of cultural intelligence to the field of intelligence and applying it to the memoirs of three intelligence officers. The results of the study demonstrate these intelligence officers possessed a high degree of CQ and it aided them in the successful accomplishment of their operations. Despite hailing from different backgrounds, including one officer working for an intelligence agency competing with the one employing the other two, CQ remained consistently high across the cases studied.

Way Forward

The applications for using CQ in the USIC are plentiful. Researchers should seek to establish a baseline in the IC and use it as a basis for further research and comparison. Long term studies across the USICs agencies, investigating their varying paradigms and how they interact with and interpret foreign intelligence would do much to reveal potential bias present in analysis. Researchers should investigate the role that CQ contributes to intelligence analysis, and researchers can extend it to intelligence consumers (policy makers) as well. It is preferable for researchers to conduct CQ evaluations in person with direct access to study subjects. Historically, the lack of cultural understanding has created a blind spot in the study of intelligence as well as the practice of intelligence in the field. The study of cultural intelligence and its application within the practice of intelligence serves as a force multiplier for intelligence agencies, with high CQ officers performing successfully in the field. Lack of cultural understanding has led to failed implementation of national policy abroad, faulty analysis of foreign intelligence, and significant loss of life among officers and agents. CQ is a factor already at play in the USIC and its effect ought to be explored fully.

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