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UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Miguel Veronique Abada

**Digital cultural intelligence platforms: Exploring
their impacts on enhancing cultural awareness in
global business settings**

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Author: Miguel Veronique Abada
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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the potential of digital platforms to raise cultural intelligence and promote cross-cultural competency in international business settings. This thesis research compares existing CQ digital platforms and their utility in enhancing employees' and organizations' industrial cultural awareness, sensitivity, and agility. This paper seeks to restore hope and bring back some optimism surrounding the future of international business by examining ways to utilize digital tools in support of intercultural learning and characterizing aspects that should be considered while optimizing these technologies for a more heterogeneous workforce. The structure of intercultural communication theories concerns cultural intelligence, cross-cultural competency, and digital learning platforms.

This study combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to evaluate the platform's user experience and general characteristics. This paper consists of user entries, survey results, and interview findings conducted by CQ digital platforms to assess the benefits and shortcomings of the present CQ digital offerings. The aforementioned factors are key requirements for effective, practical learning, which is why research has established these platforms as disseminators of quality information with user accessibility and opportunities for real-world applications. However, the information provided was not specific enough to any one business or area, which implied a need for more targeted training development. CQ development and embedding experiential learning is always challenging to evaluate, but this highlights areas for future opportunities.

This thesis contributes to existing knowledge on digital CQ platforms by suggesting their numerous advantages related to, but not limited to, the enhancement of adequate intercultural competence, balanced with disadvantages that appear through differing professional contexts in usage. The findings show that although CQ training provided via digital media is compelling, presenting information specific to the industry and/or region further enhances training effectiveness. Based on this, the following recommendations from the study seek to enhance the architecture of digital platforms that enrich cultural intelligence (CQ) and articulate directions for future research to enable CQ enhancements.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Intelligence; Cross-Cultural Competences; Intercultural Communication; Global Business; Training and Development; Emotional Intelligence, Digital cultural intelligence; Cognitive; Metacognitive

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Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
BNAM	Baltic-Nordic Acoustics Meeting
CQ	Cultural Intelligence
EQ	Emotional Intelligence
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DCI	Digital Cultural Intelligence
MI	Multiple Intelligences
CQS	Cultural Intelligence Scale
SI	Social Intelligence
ICTs	Information Communication Technologies
VR	Virtual Reality

1 INTRODUCTION

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is one of the most significant success factors for global business, international leadership, and team performance in the multicultural collaborative world we are living in today. *You have heard of IQ and EQ; what is your CQ?* Cultural intelligence (CQ) is not just a quirky buzzword for cultural competence. As Livermore (2009) stated, CQ is *"a fresh method for leading in a multicultural, globalized landscape"* (p. 2). CQ is a metric of an individual's ability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings (Earley & Ang, 2003). The following definition of general intelligence corresponds to Schmidt and Hunter: general intelligence is *"the ability to comprehend and reason with abstract concepts and to solve problems"* (Ang et al., 2007, p. 337; Schmidt & Hunter, 2000, p. 3). Sternberg's (1986) theory of intelligence describes an overall construct of importance with multiple areas of intellectual ability. While CQ contains several fundamental components (Earley and Ang, 2003), Ang et al.'s (2007) metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral skills also extend the definitions found at the top of the line. These elements are essential for comprehension, logic, and action in culturally diverse situations.

Previous research has stressed the pivotal role of CQ in determining a leader's success or failure, stating that *"a leader's CQ can easily distinguish between thriving and becoming obsolete"* (Livermore, 2009, p. 2; 2015). A survey of top senior executives worldwide by The Economist Intelligence Unit says that out of 68 countries, 90% believed that cross-cultural leadership will be their major management challenge in the future (*"CEO Briefing in 2006 and Beyond Corporate Priorities"*). Despite numerous literatures, theories, products/courses, and training designed to enhance cross-cultural effectiveness and prowess, the failure rate of international business ventures is high at 70%, with significant misunderstandings due to cultural differences (Yan et al., 2001; Livermore, 2009, p. 2; 2015).

Livermore (2009; 2015) contrasted common approaches to global leadership development as either excessively simplistic or overly complicated and prescriptive—

"smile and avoid these three taboos, and you are golden in international settings" versus a *"cross-cultural guru is required before meeting people overseas"* (p. 2). In contrast to Earley and Ang's (2003), Levy-Leboyer's (2004), Bhagat (2006), and Ang et al. (2007), seminal research provides a macro-level framework of cultural intelligence with practical and context-sensitive critical capabilities to navigate or function effectively in various settings. Such perspectives further justify a shift toward novel solutions (e.g., digital platforms) that offer dynamic and on-demand training in line with evolving professional settings. By drawing on this technology, digital platforms have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of traditional CQ training methodologies, resulting in longer-lasting intercultural competence.

Nevertheless, despite widespread acknowledgement of the foundational role CQ enables, there is a clear gap in understanding the impact of digital platforms that promote its development. While more and more organizations use digital solutions to deliver their training and development needs, rigorous empirical studies on effectiveness in CQ have been sparse (Adams & Webb, 2016, p. 211). This is particularly noteworthy since digital platforms can create scalable and experiential opportunities integral to CQ growth in today's tech-based environment (Adams & Webb, 2016). Similarly, Ang and Inkpen (2008) described that successful outcomes of offshore outsourcing are contingent upon the cultural competence trait, which they defined as a base requirement. Moreover, practitioners face numerous challenges due to the growing complexity of understanding variances and time constraints (Oktadiana & Djauhar, 2011; Soprana, 2017). Consequently, this shows that enhancing cultural intelligence in a global business context requires further exploration of innovative measures to determine appropriate tools (Livermore, 2010, p. 23).

Thus, this thesis examines the potential of digital platforms as a medium through which international trade professionals cultivate cultural awareness and sensitivity. In addition, this thesis aims to tackle previous authors' calls for more narrowly focused research in this area (e.g., Ang & Inkpen, 2008; Shapiro et al., 2008; Livermore, 2011; Rockstuhl et

al., 2011; Adams & Webb, 2016; Jyoti & Kour, 2017; Spreitzer et al., 2021; and Zhang et al., 2021). In a mixed-method design that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, this study examines the effects of digital cultural intelligence platforms on cultural awareness as well as explores professionals' experiences using these tools. Thus, this study has crafted a combination of methods to enhance our understanding of the effectiveness of these platforms. The study addresses the research question (RQ): ***How do digital cultural intelligence platforms promote cultural awareness and intercultural proficiency to professionals working in business settings with global reach?***

Through this process, current research provides three essential contributions to the literature. First and foremost, this thesis expands our knowledge of CQ and shows how digital platforms can be valuable tools for implementing practical steps toward their development. However, this thesis provides empirical evidence-based data to inform best practices in digital CQ training. While previous research studies have established the fundamental significance of CQ, this thesis goes above and beyond to explore how social media can support and nurture cultural intelligence (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Livermore & Ang, 2015). These findings offer enormous opportunities to organizations that want to improve their ability to perform in cross-cultural situations, as well as encourage better collaboration and communication within diverse teams.

Moving forward, the author addresses the research gaps in the current literature and offers practical recommendations for constructing and enhancing these platforms. These insights would enable organizations to develop successful strategies for implementing digital solutions that foster cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence among their diverse workforces. The contributions to the construction of secure, seamless, and productive CQ platforms, including practical experience as well as concepts for diverse businesses, have come from reputable scholars, such as Adams & Webb, 2016; Jyoti & Kour, 2015; Spreitzer et al., 2021. All in all, the results provide significant contributions to dialogues about CQ in international business, which may bear implications for practice as well as policy/training. Moreover, this research offers directions for future research

and the study's implications in practice and academia. Existing research gaps (Figure 1.) presents the importance of CQ at a global business level differs markedly from previous ones.

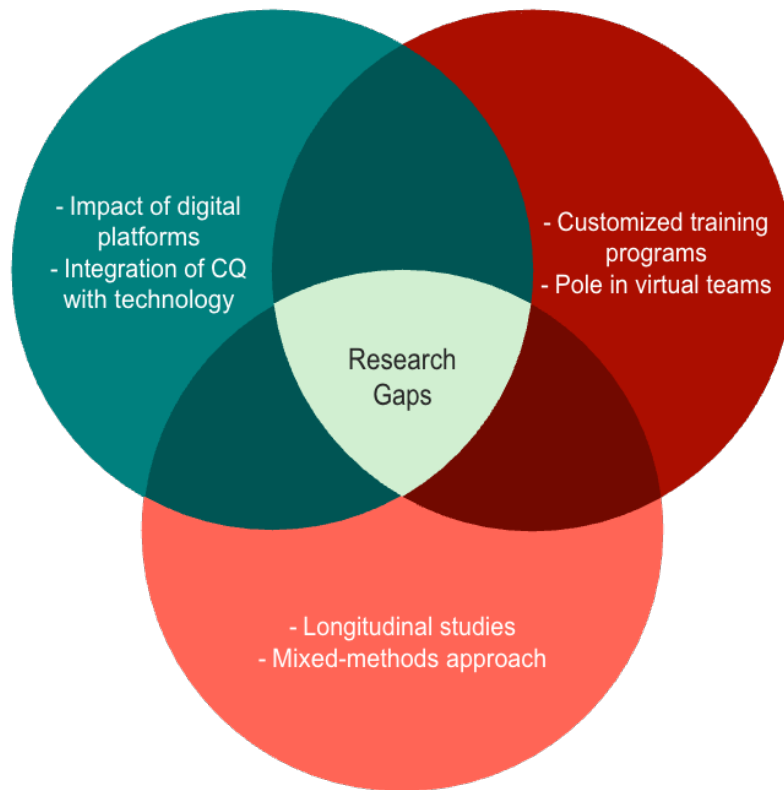


Figure 1. Existing research gaps in the current literature.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In today's rapidly globalizing business setting, the emergence of cultural intelligence (CQ) as the newer model of changing consumer dynamics is increasingly essential. Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, "*Frames of Mind*" (1983), and Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence (1984; 1985) contributed to the evolution of the "*intelligence*" concept. Ultimately, this led to the rise of CQ as a complex factor critical to business operations across national borders. Instead, CQ goes beyond the traditional IQ boundaries and encompasses many more skills related to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral areas of functioning (Gardner, 1983, p. 9; Klitgaard, 1984; Sternberg, 1986, pp. 3-8; Gigch, 1989; Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). These abilities are increasingly important in complex, multicultural environments where the adequacy of worldwide operations, team collaboration, and cross-cultural negotiations depends on understanding, respecting, and adjusting to cultural differences. As organizations are launching initiatives to improve their international reach and their cultural capacity, the theory and practice of CQ have become essential components of sustainable worldwide businesses. Thus, this introduction sets the groundwork for exploring CQ and its diverse dimensions, how CQ can be assessed and measured, as well as its wide-range potential impact on foreign trade, consistent with contemporary demand for CQ leadership and strategy in today's globalized world.

2.1 Intelligence theories and cultural intelligence

The seminal works on intelligence by Gardner and Sternberg significantly changed the field of theories of intelligence, introducing multiple dimensions to human abilities beyond IQ. In 1983, Gardner published "*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*," which introduced the concept of multiple intelligences (MI) to the public as a challenge to the notion that there is one measurable capacity that can be qualified and quantified and, above all, to such an assumption that this capacity varies from person to person (Gardner, 1999, p. 33). Gardner claimed that intelligence is the "*mental*

activities" individuals use to resolve issues or create products with value in one or more cultural contexts (1983, p. 160). Originally, Gardner proposed seven intelligences—linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (1999). Still, he has since expanded his framework to include naturalistic and existential (Gardner). Gardner (2011) identified eight intelligences, each representing distinct cognitive profiles and adaptability to various environments (p. 43).

Correspondingly, Sternberg (1984, 1985) proposed the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence, another three-dimensional classification of intelligence—analytic, creative, and practical. Sternberg argued that intelligence extends beyond academics—much more—and he pointed out the importance of success in life problems and adaptability. In his Theory of Successful Intelligence, he reminded the field that success in life requires a balance of analytical, creative, and practical intelligence used in society (Sternberg, 1996). Gardner and Sternberg underscored the diversity of human capacities, emphasizing that each person possesses a unique profile of multiple intelligences, some innate and others requiring cultivation (Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1996). These frameworks reject a narrow definition of intelligence, unlike the traditional IQ test, which is allegedly culture- and language-biased and contextually limited in settings other than Western ones (Wellington, 2006; Leighton, 2007; Murdoch, 2007; Taylor, 2007).

From these foundations, Earley and Ang (2003) conceptualized cultural intelligence (CQ) as a four-dimensional construct comprising metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions. Earley and Ang (2003) developed CQ to address individuals' unique adaptation and performance challenges in culturally diverse settings, partly in response to similar constrained measures based solely on IQ. Ang and Van Dyne (2008) asserted that CQ goes beyond EQ and SI because it directly considers cross-cultural differences. Although both EQ and SI focus on an individual's emotional and social competencies, CQ adds metacognition to the mix, which is the ability to reflect on changing cultural dynamics (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). This distinction establishes CQ as

one of the most essential skills for leading globally and communicating and working with people from different cultures.

In the context of globalization, although several studies need to emphasize CQ, their research results confirm that it has greater salience in international business environments than traditional measures of success. Scholars suggest that CQ, EQ, and SI constructs present a novel approach to achieving global competitive advantages (Crowne, 2013a). MI theory (Gardner, 1983) supports the integration, while SI and EQ emerge from interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, signifying non-cognitive skills that accommodate social and emotional needs. Despite their simultaneous examination, the relationships between CQ, EQ, and SI as joint predictors of job performance and organizational outcomes have received little empirical research (Crowne, 2008; Crowne, Phatak & Salunkhe, 2009). This gap highlights the need for additional research to explore how these constructs collectively influence effectiveness at the individual and organizational levels.

Gardner's MI theory and Sternberg's Triarchic Theory, which have advanced a multi-component conception of intelligence for over 30 years, closely align with the underlying conceptual frameworks for CQ. These theories emphasize the importance of solving various kinds of cultural and contextual challenges as contributing to overall human skills and, thereby, providing a broader and more holistic perspective on abilities. CQ is one of the most essential frameworks that can help individuals cope with our multicultural and globalized world. However, its empirical and theoretical foundations have much more room for improvement (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008, p. 667).

2.2 Cultural intelligence

In a rapidly changing global corporate environment, cultural intelligence is becoming increasingly crucial for culturally diverse employees. Unlike the traditional cross-cultural competence framework, this integrative paradigm incorporates metacognitive, cognitive,

motivational, and behavioral elements. This model is the only one that fully encompasses cultural intelligence and is based on theories of intelligence (Van Dyne, Ang, & Koh, 2008; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). While other techniques focus on cross-cultural communication, CQ provides a broader understanding of what qualities and behaviors are essential for a productive international multicultural environment (Leung et al., 2014; Schmidmeier et al., 2020).

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a concept that identifies different behavioral abilities that individuals benefit from when interacting in new cultural contexts, as Matsumoto and Hwang (2013) noted. The same authors pointed out that CQ is beneficial for measuring cross-cultural competence. It challenges our ability to communicate between two cultures. Van Dyne et al. (2008) have determined that CQ, unlike other theories, is a higher-order construct encompassing four dimensions—behavioral, motivational, cognitive, and metacognitive. While this inclusion may seem odd given that no other model thoroughly embraces or extends the intelligence theory to include all aspects of QC, traditional cross-cultural competence focuses on defined skills for dealing with international and intercultural situations. In contrast, cultural intelligence adoption focuses more on the traits and behaviors required to work in culturally diverse settings effectively (Leung et al., 2014). Correspondently, higher cultural intelligence optimizes cross-cultural competence (Leung et al., 2014; Schmidmeier et al., 2020).

Scholars such as Earley and Ang (2003), Thomas and Inkson (2004), and Livermore (2015) rigorously described CQ to explain how it prepares individuals and organizations for cross-cultural work and emphasizes the importance of understanding and valuing differences. This adaptability improves international operations and communications. Thus, CQ is crucial to organizational effectiveness in many cultures. It is essential to regularly examine CQ since it affects communication, strategic decision-making relationships, corporate cooperation, and collaborative team dynamics (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang et al., 2006; Ang & Inkpen, 2008; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). In addition, the accelerated pace of globalization has also highlighted the need

for a deep understanding of and ability to respond to the challenges of cultural diversity. Amiri et al. (2010) and Michaud (2014) argue that cultural errors can hinder successful communication, and thus, experts must develop the ability to interact with people from different cultural bases meaningfully. In this setting, CQ develops into a fundamental competency that enables representatives of both the open and private sectors to establish positive intuitions and create a conducive working environment (Amiri et al., 2010; Michaud, 2014).

Furthermore, CQ determines the building of cross-cultural competence, often called intercultural competence or sensitivity. This relationship is significant in worldwide trade settings, where the capacity to lock in with people from different cultural foundations effectively depends on a concordant mix of aptitudes, information, and individual qualities (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 543). While reviewing over 30 cross-cultural competence models, which encompass 300 concepts aimed at elucidating facets of intercultural effectiveness, it becomes clear that these models cover a broad spectrum, focusing on various elements such as a person's traits, attitudes, worldviews, or distinct capabilities (Johnson et al., 2006; Ang et al., 2006; Ang et al., 2007; Van Dyne & Ang, 2008; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; Rockstuhl et al., 2011; Holt & Seki, 2012; Ang et al., 2013; Leung et al., 2014; Livermore & Ang, 2015; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Researchers have criticized these models, despite their far-reaching applicability, for their wide widespread appropriateness, proposing they regularly come up short of capturing the complexities and subtleties characteristic of real-world cultural dynamics, possibly misrepresenting the tremendous diversity of personal social encounters (Holt & Seki, 2012; Ang et al., 2013). Such generalizations may lead to inadequate solutions for specific cross-cultural challenges (e.g., empirical studies have shown that foundational models such as Hofstede's dimensions fail to account for in-country variations or the dynamic nature of advancing cultures (McSweeney, 2002; Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010).

Moreover, Erez et al. (2013) challenged the reliability of self-administered tests for measuring CQ, raising concerns about their ability to accurately reflect on one's cultural

competence, potentially leading to biased data. Leung et al. (2014) investigated the CQ model's adaptability, which may cultivate closeness at the cost of genuine social exchange and understanding. As a result of these issues, several measuring methods have improved in response to these challenges: Dynamic simulation approaches and field-sensitive evaluations better account for cultural interactions than previous measuring methods (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Given these concerns and the continuous development of international relations, the CQ models and IBP domain require constant updates and revisions to match the global socio-cultural environment (Mendenhall et al., 2013; Johnson, 2017). Critically, Rockstuhl and Ng (2018) further emphasize the need to refine these models to capture CQ's complexity better and stress the significance of addressing these obstacles in future CQ research.

Hence, intercultural competence results from high CQ, which means that people with high levels of CQ must have considerable intercultural competence.

2.2.1 Definitions and cultural intelligence conceptualization

Many vital authors (e.g., Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas & Inkson, 2004) have laid the foundation for the definition and research of cultural intelligence (CQ). Earley (2002) was among the earliest to conceptualize CQ, identifying three key components—motivational, cognitive, and behavioral—that determine an individual's ability to adjust in different cultural contexts. According to Earley (2002), successful intercultural interaction is a group-level phenomenon whereby people can work effectively across national sectoral and cultural boundaries. Building upon this foundation, Earley and Ang (2003, p. 59) defined CQ in their seminal book *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Interactions Across Cultures* as *"an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings"* (Solomon, 2017). Figure 2. present the conceptualization of cultural intelligence.

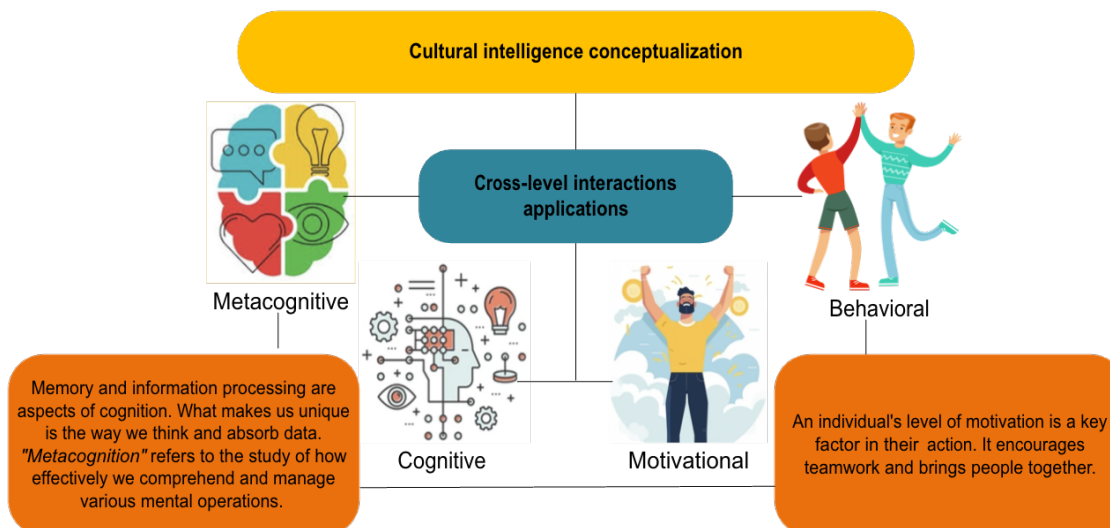


Figure 2. Cultural intelligence conceptualization

This conceptualization emphasizes CQ as a necessary tool for those who seek to negotiate and function successfully in multicultural environments (Earley & Ang, 2003; Warner, 2009).

Previous literature developed an advanced conceptual framework known as "*Cultural Intelligence (CQ)*" in their publication "*Cultural Intelligence: People Skills for Global Business*," expanding on the foundational concepts introduced by Earley (2002) and building upon the work of Ting-Toomey (1999), Sermol (2001), Thomas and Inkson (2003), along with Thomas (2006). According to them, integrating cultural knowledge, mindfulness (the capacity to adjust one's behavior mindfully and inventively in shifted social settings), and behavioral aptitudes are significant for developing CQ. Besides, Thomas (2006, p. 80) characterized QC as "*the capacity to lock in viably with people from distinctive cultural foundations*," highlighting information, mindfulness, and behavioral abilities as crucial components. Thomas et al. (2008) developed this framework, characterizing CQ as "*an interplay of knowledge and skills, underpinned by cultural metacognition, enabling individuals to adapt to and shape their cultural environments*" (Thomas et al., 2008, p. 126). Figure 3. below displays the components of CQ stated by Early and Mosakowski (2004) in their research work.

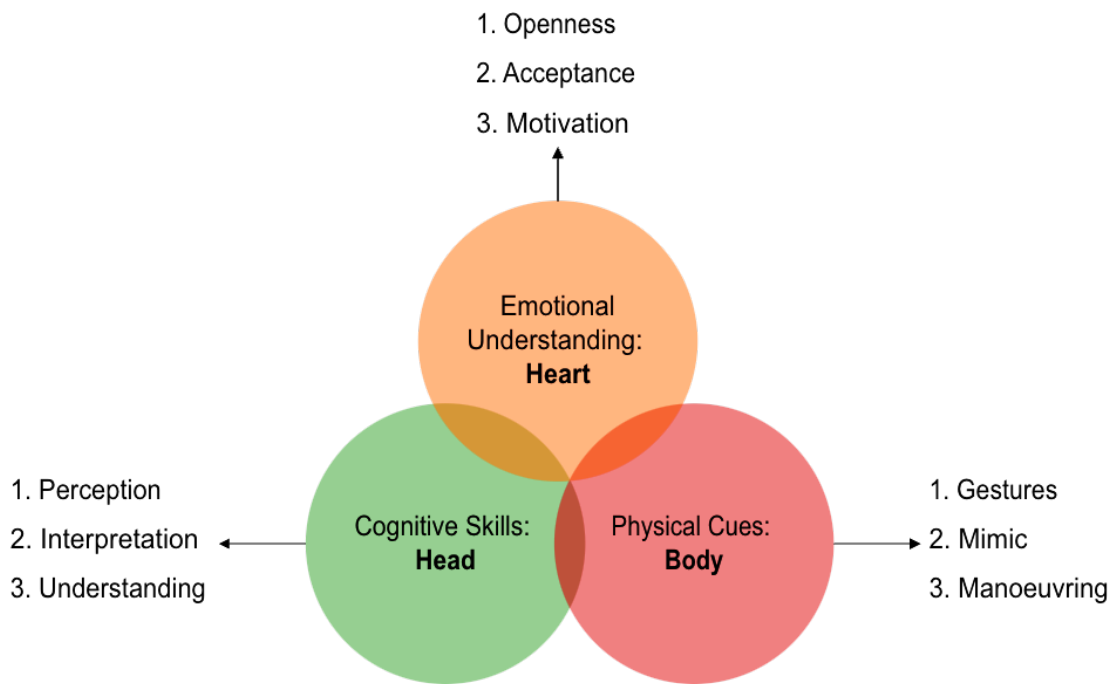


Figure 3. Three sources of cultural intelligence (under Earley & Mosakowski, 2004).

Furthermore, Earley and Mosakowski (2004) identified three dimensions of CQ: cognitive skills, physical cues, and emotional/motivational understanding, each symbolizing the head, body, and heart, respectively. "*Cultural intelligence*" refers to an individual's ability to interpret and mirror unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures in the same manner as their colleagues or compatriots. According to Earley and Mosakowski (2004, p. 140), CQ is a seemingly natural ability that enables individuals to function and manage effectively in cross-cultural scenarios. Ang et al. (2007) define CQ as the capacity of an individual to function and manage effectively in a cross-cultural situation. When interacting with multinational partners, investors, and clients, public and private service professionals must possess cultural intelligence to operate and serve consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Table 1. below provides a summary of CQ's definitions.

Table 1. Cultural intelligence (CQ) definitions

Author (s)	QC definitions	Constituent elements
Early (2002); Early and Ang, (2003)	<i>"A person's ability to adapt effectively to new cultural background."</i>	Four dimensions: Cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, behavioral.
Thomas and Inkson (2003)	<i>"Involves understanding the fundamentals of intercultural interaction, developing a mindful approach to intercultural interactions, and building adaptive repertoire of behavior so, that individuals are effective in diverse intercultural contexts."</i>	Knowledge, mindfulness, behavioral skills
Early and Mosa- kowski (2004)	<i>"Cultural Intelligence (QC) refers to an individual's ability to interpret and mirror unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures in the same manner as their colleagues or compatriots." ..." A seemingly natural ability that enables individuals to function and manage effectively in cross-cultural scenarios"</i>	Three dimensions of QC: cognitive, physical, and emotional/motivational.
Thomas (2006)	<i>"The ability to interact effectively with individuals from diverse cultural background."</i>	Three dimensions: Knowledge, mindfulness, and behavior.
Ang et al. (2007)	<i>"Individuals' capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings."</i>	Four dimensions: Cognitive, metacognitive, motivation, behavior.
Thomas et al. (2008)	<i>"A system of interacting knowledge and skills, linked by cultural metacognition, allowing individuals to adapt to select and shape the cultural aspects of their environment."</i>	Cross-cultural knowledge; Cultural skills; Cultural. Metacognition.

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is based on Sternberg and Detterman's (1986) multiple intelligence theory, which posits that human intelligence encompasses a variety of spaces, including metacognition, cognition, and motivation, all of which are mental resources stored in the head, as well as overt actions that serve as indicators of behavioral abilities. This correlates with Gardner's (1983) Social Intelligence Theory, which examines interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence for self-regulation and social interaction management. Based on these theoretical frameworks, Earley and Ang (2003) defined CQ as a combination of mental (meta-cognitive and cognitive), motivational, and behavioral components appropriate to cross-cultural challenges. Ang and Van Dyne (2008) developed CQ into four dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral, providing a complete approach to understanding and utilizing CQ in varied intercultural situations. This updated model emphasizes the necessity of a nuanced approach to CQ in helping people and organizations understand and manage cross-cultural complexity. Figure 4. below illustrates the benefits of cross-cultural interactions.

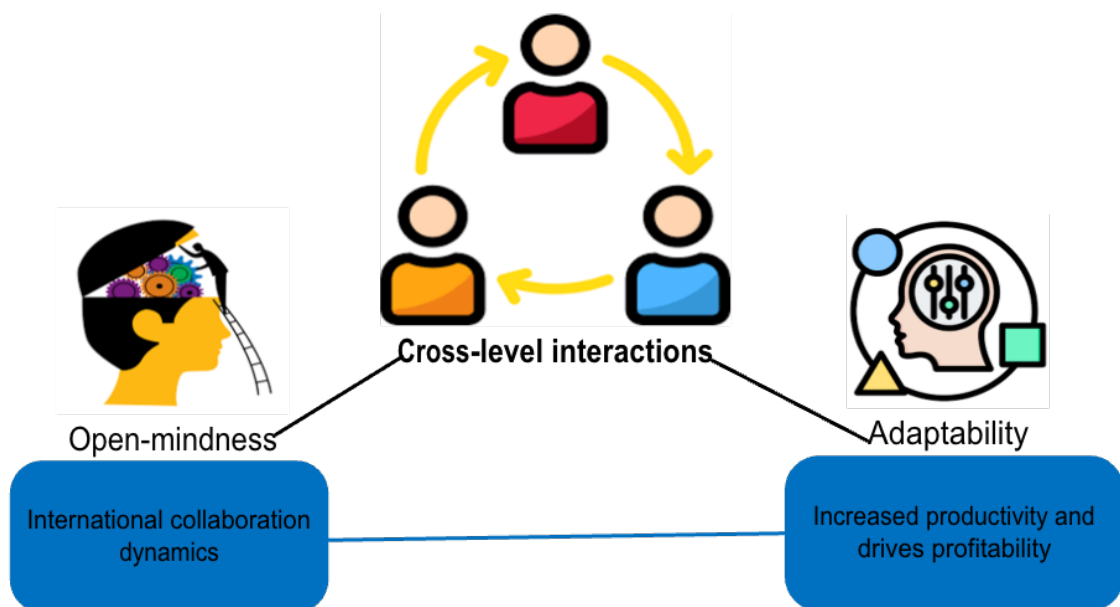


Figure 4. Benefits of cross-cultural interactions

At the same time, previous authors (e.g., Livermore, 2008; Van Dyne et al., 2010; Livermore, 2010; 2011) proposed a multidimensional model for CQ, as seen in Figure 5. below. In this framework, CQ has four main dimensions: CQ Drive (motivational), CQ Knowledge (cognitive), CQ Strategy (meta-cognitive) CQ Action (behavioral). In her 2010 book, *The New Secret to Success*, Livermore (2010) states that cultural intelligence (CQ) is the critical driver of motivation and exploration. CQ strategies can improve the performance of international business professionals. In his 2011 book, *"The Cultural Intelligence Difference: Master the One Skill You Can't Do Without in Today's Global Economy,"* Livermore explores the approaches to developing CQ capabilities. Livermore (2015) also recommends that to advance CQ among leaders in today's global economy; they must cut across universal filters and cultural categories into the personal. Since globalization has made communication across multiple cultural backgrounds essential, professionals need CQ to communicate effectively with foreign clients. Figure 5. Below presents CQ's four-factor model.

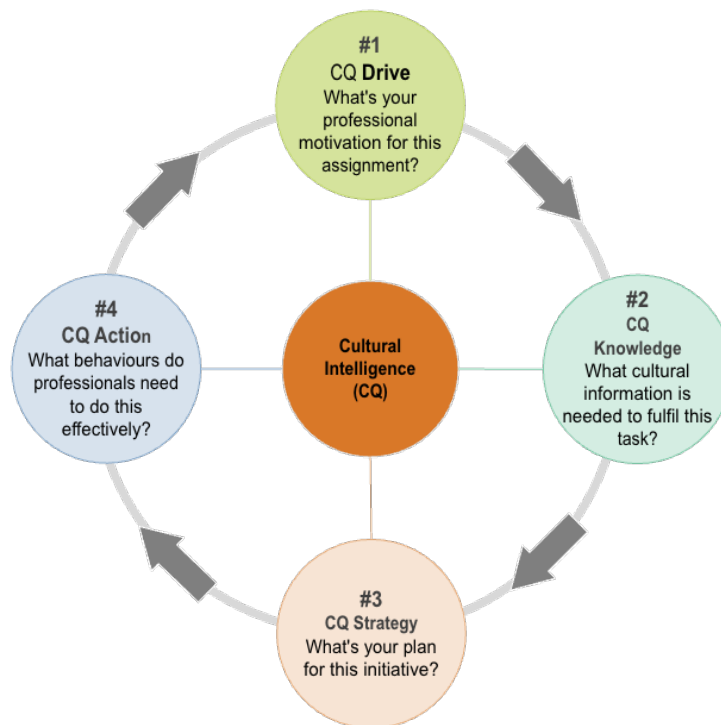


Figure 5. CQ four-factors model (Livermore, 2008; 2011, p. 25).

2.2.2 Cultural intelligence as a multi-dimensional construct

As the author may have mentioned previously, CQ comprises four unique capabilities: Strategic CQ, Knowledge CQ, Drive CQ and Action CQ. Four capabilities are linked together Van Dyne (2010) and each of these clearly contributes to a person's ability to work well in culturally diverse settings (Van Dyne, Ang, & Livermore, 2010; Livermore, 2010, 2011).

CQ Drive (Motivation) demonstrates interest, confidence, and the drive to adapt effectively to cross-culturally diverse settings. Often overlooked, without the ample drive to tackle the challenges that inevitably accompany cross-cultural scenarios, there is little evidence of success (Livermore, 2009). In other words, Drive CQ (motivational CQ) is a core dimension that encapsulates individuals' intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm for engaging with and adapting to diverse cultural landscapes (Ang et al., 2007; Livermore, 2009). This CQ dimension is instrumental in urging individuals to seek and value cross-cultural encounters, thereby fostering the cultivation of profound intercultural capabilities (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Miller 1988; Bandura, 2002; Ang et al., 2007; Livermore, 2009). Motivational CQ refers to our desire to learn more about cultural interactions and improve our ability to do so through work-related activities. However, this increases their likelihood of effectively navigating challenging cultural situations and thriving in a multicultural environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Miller 1988; Bandura, 2002; Livermore, 2009). Moreover, Drive CQ promotes the examination of many cultural paradigms in international interaction while simultaneously applying this comprehension. The assertion is that it enhances learning and adaptation, continuously improving organizational interaction agility across diverse cultural contexts (Ang et al., 2007; Livermore, 2009).

Moreover, Livermore (2009) asserts that Drive CQ reflects an individual's dedication and perseverance while engaging in cross-cultural interactions and confronting associated hurdles. This dimension contradicts the widely held belief that individuals must self-organize in the face of cultural differences. In several organizations, minority

employment training and international postings seem more as impositions than genuine commitments to cultural diversity. Fatigue can undermine substantive motivation and lead to failure in cross-cultural training; individuals need more intrinsic personal motivation to be willing to accept and benefit from global diversity. With this primary drive, it is possible to use Drive CQ to make significant progress and development across many cultural contexts. This illustrates the critical importance of this CQ asset for individuals and groups operating in a globalized environment (Livermore, 2009).

CQ Knowledge (Cognitive): People gain cognitive knowledge of the many rules, customs, and norms that are unique to different cultures through schooling, real-life experiences, and learning about the legal, economic, and social systems that are different in each culture (Ang et al., 2007; Livermore, 2009). However, this knowledge grows through educational activities and hands-on experience, which allows for a more complex understanding of how these factors affect social and professional intelligence in different cultural settings (Triandis, 1994; 2000; Ang et al., 2007). Such information is vital for compelling communication in multicultural settings, as it prepares people with the capacity to explore the complex dynamics of universal business and leadership (Ang & Inkpen, 2008).

In addition, Livermore (2009) clarified that CQ knowledge is fundamental for pioneers, emphasizing the importance of adeptly overseeing the impact of social differences on commerce procedures and outcomes. It probes the depth of a leader's understanding of how cultural contexts shape thought forms, behaviors, and organizational practices, emphasizing the significance of recognizing and esteeming cultural diversities. Intercultural competency programs regularly highlight this knowledge, but its adequacy in authority pivots on its integration with other measurements of CQ. Adopting a comprehensive approach to fully utilize the benefits of CQ knowledge and establish effective leadership in a global setting is crucial. Failure to do so may constrain its potential benefits. Consequently, combining a significant understanding of social subtleties with other viewpoints of cultural intelligence is essential for pioneers

endeavoring to exceed expectations in the international market (Livermore, 2009). This knowledge is often emphasized in intercultural competency programs—its effectiveness as a governance dual hinges on its integration with the other aspects of CQ. A holistic approach is necessary to maximize the benefits of the CQ concept and implement leadership practices adapted to the global environment. Failure to do so may limit the full benefits of the CQ concept. Thus, having a well-developed sense of social nuances along with behavioral aspects of cultural intelligence is essential for leaders who are trying to thrive in the global marketplace (Livermore, 2009).

CQ strategy (metacognitive) involves one's cognitive process of understanding and handling interaction in various cultural settings. However, this dimension involves pursuing cultural knowledge and effectively moderating one's mental processes when faced with cultural differences (Flavell, 1979). Livermore (2009) elaborates that the CQ Strategy encompasses an individual's application of cultural understanding toward strategizing and navigating multicultural interactions. Those competencies in the CQ strategy illustrate increased sensitivity and mindfulness to the cultural subtleties of others amid engagements (Ang et al., 2007). Moreover, they are proficient at investigating their cultural presuppositions, showing a positive and versatile approach to leveraging their cultural experiences for more nuanced communication with people from changed social backgrounds (Ang & Inkpen, 2008).

CQ Action (Behavioral): Adapting appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions to engage in cross-cultural interactions is important. In other words, CQ Action (behavioral) is an individual's ability to navigate verbal and nonverbal communications across diverse cultural landscapes adeptly, tailoring language, facial expressions, gestures, and tones to meet the expectations of various cultural groups (Gudykunst et al., 1988; Moghaddam, 1990; Ang et al., 2007; Livermore, 2009). CQ Action behavioral adaptability plays a crucial role in cross-cultural interactions. This part of cultural intelligence looks at how to change your actions to improve relationships and get what you want in different cultural settings (Gudykunst et al., 1988; Moghaddam, 1990; Ang et al., 2007; Livermore, 2009).

Moreover, **CQ Action** entails a leader's skill in discerning when to adjust behaviors to align with different cultural norms and when maintaining one's authentic manner of interaction is more appropriate (Livermore 2009). The author added that this balance is crucial for achieving performance objectives in a global context without compromising one's integrity. A higher level of CQ involves understanding which behavioral practices are most appropriate in different contexts and cultures to promote greater productivity and task efficiency. This culminated in culture-specific behavior formation, i.e., what one needs to do as an "*ideal*" leader to perform and fulfil all objectives while embracing all variations across cultures. Livermore (2009) states that CQ Action needs change and genuine self-presentation in international culture.

Ang et al. (2007) established the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) framework, which forms the basis of the vast theoretical and empirical knowledge base in the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) field. Ang et al. (2004) initially formulated and validated the CQS, and Van Dyne et al. (2008) further developed and categorized the CQ into four distinct elements: strategic, action, drive, and knowledge. However, this scale, consisting of 20 items, methodically evaluates these dimensions, providing a structured approach to comprehending how individuals navigate the complexities of cultural diversity. Research showed that CQS, as a measure of health strategy CQ, action CQ, drive CQ, and knowledge CQ, can help individuals master the critical competencies needed to survive in a cross-cultural environment. However, this general framework explains the difference in an individual's ability to handle intercultural differences and lays a groundwork for dissecting the nature of cross-cultural effectiveness (Van Dyne et al., 2010; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). While it is known that CQ has three components, it provides a broad framework to describe an individual's level of preparedness to navigate cross-cultural differences. The CQS sheds new light on the complex concept of CQ and provides experts with the tools to assess and develop this important aspect of global success (Van Dyne et al., 2010; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015).

Authors (Templer et al., 2006; Ang et al., 2007) highlight that CQ is known for multidimensionality, including four dimensions, each influencing different outcomes (Ang et al., 2007). Such nuance makes an excellent case for treating CQ as a multidimensional construct; the impact of each dimension will be context-dependent and even outcome-dependent. Even earlier, some researchers had begun calling for a holistic perspective to analyze the impact of CQ facets (e.g., Van Dyne et al., 2007; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). For example, Imai and Gelfand (2010) showed that Action CQ and Drive CQ differ in their ability to predict negotiation behavior, indicating that some aspects of CQ may differentially contribute to negotiation outcomes. Correspondingly, Strategy CQ, on the other hand, facilitates a modern way of exchanging new ideas among different people from various cultures by playing a strategic role in idea sharing (Chua et al., 2012).

Further, the research conducted by Yunlu et al. (2017) found positive relationships between Knowledge CQ, Strategy CQ, and Action CQ and higher levels of individual creativity, which could be considered a different aspect of how various dimensions of CQ may contribute to creative outcomes. Together, these findings highlight the complex relationships between the facets of CQ and specific interpersonal and organizational outcomes. Understanding the different yet intertwined roles of Knowledge, Strategy, Action, and Drive CQ enables researchers and practitioners to more precisely design their interventions for developing CQ in various contexts that enhance cross-cultural interaction, creativity and negotiation. The use of cultural intelligence (CQ) frameworks varies due to differences in research contexts. Researchers are predominantly interested in CQ as an independent variable and, as such, examine its direct effects. Conversely, a few studies have also considered CQ as a moderating or mediating variable to understand its complex impacts better. Table 2. summarizes numerous academic research studies incorporating the CQ framework into their design and Table 3. Present the most significant publications and contributions in the field.

Table 2. Cultural intelligence definitions

Author (s)	Diverse applications
Early et al. (2002); Temple et al. (2006); Prado (2006); Ang et al. (2007); Lee & Sukoco (2010); Imai & Gelfand (2010); De la Garza Carranza & Egri (2010); Ramalu et al. (2010); Chen et al. (2011); Rockstuhl et al. (2011); Kim & Van Dyne (2011); Groves & Feyerherm (2011); Chua et al. (2012); Abdul Malek & Budhwar (2013); Charoensukmongkol (2016); Yun-Lu et al. (2017).	Independent variables
Crowne (2008); Ng, Tan & Ang (2009); Engle & Nehrt (2012); Engle & Crowne (2014); Frías-Jamilena et al. (2017)	Dependent variable
Elenkov & Manev (2019); Lovvorn & Chen (2011); Ramsey et al. (2011); Tuan (2015); Sahin & Gürbüz (2017)	Moderating variable
Oolders et al. (2008); Van Dyne et al. (2008); Ward & Fischer (2008); Kim & Van Dyne (2012); Ramalu et al. (2012); Moon et al. (2012); Korzilius et al. (2017)	Mediating variable

Table 3. The most influential publications and contributions to the issue

Publications	Titles	Sources
Early & Ang (2003)	<i>Cultural Intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures</i>	Stanford University Press
Ang et al., (2007)	<i>Cultural Intelligence: Its Measurement and Decision-making, Cultural Adaptation and Task Performance</i>	Management & Organization Review
Earley & Peterson (2004)	<i>The Elusive Cultural Chameleon: Cultural Intelligence as a New Approach to Intercultural Training for the Global Manager</i>	Academy of Management Learning & Education
Ng et al. (2009)	<i>From Experience to Experiential Learning: Cultural Intelligence as a Learning Capability for Global Leader Development</i>	Academy of Management Learning & Education

Ang et al. (2006)	<i>Personality Correlates of the Four-Factor Model of Cultural Organization</i>	<i>Group & Organization Management</i>
Templer et al. (2006)	<i>Motivational Cultural Intelligence, Realistic Job Preview and Cross-cultural Adjustment</i>	<i>Group & Organization Management</i>
Johnson et al. (2006)	<i>Cross-cultural Competence in International Business: Towards a Definition and a Model</i>	<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>
Lévy et al. (2007)	<i>What we Talk about When we Talk about "Global "Mindset": Managerial Cognition in Multinational Corporations</i>	<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>
Early & Mosakowski (2004)	<i>Cultural Intelligence</i>	<i>Harvard Business Review</i>
Thomas (2006)	<i>Domain and Development of Cultural Intelligence: The Importance of Mindfulness</i>	<i>Group & Organization Management</i>
Imai & Gelfand (2010)	<i>The Culturally Intelligence Negotiator: The Impact of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) on Negotiation Sequences and Outcomes</i>	<i>Organisational Behavior & Human Decision Processes</i>
Gupta & Govindarajan (2002)	<i>Cultivating a Global Mindset</i>	<i>Academy of Management Executive</i>
Ang & Van Dyne (2008)	<i>Handbook of Cultural Intelligence: Theory Measurement and Applications</i>	<i>Me Sharpe</i>
Shaffer et al. (2006)	<i>You can it with You: Individual Differences and Expatriate Effectiveness</i>	<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>

2.3 Cultural intelligence and digital technologies

In today's modern world, the new environment for intercultural communication, transformed by digital technology, has provided new platforms for cultural intelligence

(CQ) and CQ action. CQ is an essential capability in a globalized age. Professionals now consider CQ dynamic and cognitive, allowing them to work successfully in a flexible environment. Such skills become more critical as cultural borders erode due to globalization (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Thomas et al., 2018). With the continuous advancement of information and communication technology, digital platforms have changed how we communicate culture. Several scholars (e.g., Cheng & Chen, 2008; Smith & Duarte, 2021) have found that these platforms form novel modalities to bridge the cultural divide by providing mechanisms and features to become more familiar with unknown cultures. Through digital platform-enabled applications or training, CQ improves professionals' metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral competencies in an intercultural setting and helps users detect cultural nuances. Likewise, CQ sustains professionals' motivation despite challenges encountered and regulates their behaviors (Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang et al., 2007; Ang & Van Dyne, 2011).

2.3.1 Conceptualization and digital platform's impact

Leveraging digital platforms to enhance cross-cultural communication: Wang (2018) notes that cultural diversity presents unique challenges for global virtual teams, emphasizing the widely recognized importance of CQ in enhancing performance, with digital platforms playing an essential role. These teams often operate in the virtual world, requiring a high awareness of different cultures. For example, Wang (2018) added that agile practices have advantages for CQ development activities. As the cultural transactions of globalization remove borders, success in intercultural interactions relies on both psychological and digital platforms (Presbitero, 2016; Smith & Duarte, 2021).

In addition, CQ has predictive validity in academic and organizational contexts and plays a vital role in fostering innovation in global organizations. Such innovations arise from the capacity of culturally intelligent people to provoke creativity and visionary thinking in multicultural teams (Elenkov & Manev, 2009; Solomons et al., 2019; Iskhakova & Ott,

2020). CQ has been shown to work in many fields and primarily benefits from being integrated with digital technologies. Social media and mobile platforms, as described in previous literature (Botha et al., 2009; Dragoni et al., 2014; Cray et al., 2018; Lee & Yu, 2018), facilitate cross-cultural awareness and enhance communication, thus transforming the approach of developing cultural competence for global business decision-making.

To sum up, bringing CQ and digital technology together is a significant milestone in intercultural communication. Based on the classical works of Earley and Ang (2003), Cheng and Chen (2008), Thomas et al. (2021), and Smith and Duarte (2018), they uniquely showcase the substantive quality that digital platforms carry in promoting CQ and community development across cultures. These platforms play an essential role in their innovative utilization of information and communication technology and directly contribute to developing CQ's metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Ang et al., 2007; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Given the globalization phenomenon in which disparate cultures are ever more connected, the effectiveness of using these digital technologies needs to be an integral part of everyone's international experience, as this will lead to better individual and team performance across borders (Presbitero, 2016; Wang, 2018). To conclude, synthesizing insights from the studies cited above emphasizes the crucial role—even if indirect—that digital platforms play in promoting global competence in our lives today and highlights how engaging with cultural intelligence is vital to becoming more equipped to deal with the challenges of our globalized world.

The impact of digital platforms on CQ: In an era of globalization marked by rising cultural complexities, digital platforms have become essential in fostering cultural awareness. According to Ang et al. (2007, 2011) and Botha et al. (2009), the emergence of technology and mobile platforms has greatly facilitated the development of cultural intelligence (CQ), enabling teams to communicate effectively, understand one another, and navigate cultural differences seamlessly. Ermasova (2021), Minbaeva et al. (2021),

and Tahirkheli (2022) have explored the role of CQ in cross-cultural corporate ethics, team dynamics, and within e-leadership in virtual environments.

Technological advances in cultural competence: Botha et al. (2009) state that using mobile learning platforms is a critical application of technology that provides a practical approach to building cultural competencies. Despite challenges (e.g., internet connectivity and technology access), these platforms have enabled excellent staff interfacing opportunities despite existing business culture and language barriers. However, it shows how mobile phones facilitate cross-cultural interactions and contribute to increased cultural literacy.

Recent CQ advances driven by AI and machine learning are discovering new use case paradigms. Heflin et al. (2020) describe that while AI technology can gradually simulate complex situations in culture, this will provide users with constructive feedback and learning opportunities. Moreover, Hu et al. (2020) state that social media can help in cross-cultural adjustment by offering platforms for reference groups, where individuals can exchange experiences by interacting with people from distinctly different cultural backgrounds.

Technology plays a crucial role in global business—recent advances in AI and machine learning have significantly expanded the definition of cultural intelligence (CQ). They allow for simulation and analysis of complex cultural interactions, provide feedback for individuals or organizations, and become a powerful learning tool (Heflin et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2020). Cultural exposure should also include social media; these changes among diverse cultures are a possibility thanks to the easy access social media provides us in engaging with others, ensuring that individuals become aware and sensitive through larger multinational companies.

Digital platform applicability and case studies: New scholars provide a holistic perspective on the importance of technology in increasing CQ within different industries.

Wang et al. (2023) concluded that the use of ICTs can both support intercultural competencies across the profile of international students and foster a more experiential learning environment in the educational experience of hospitality programs. As an earlier example, which highlights the direct benefits of information and communication technology in cultivating culturally diverse SUV-organized labor. Similarly, Haris et al. (2023) challenge the differences in organizational culture and digital transformation of SMEs in post-pandemic business aspects. According to their studies, the availability of tech know-how and how digitally competent an organization is can play a crucial role in driving growth in this economy.

Jiang et al. (2023) examine how adopting knowledge management strategies can manage the country-specific growth of intellectual property-generating sectors. The same authors underscore the role of technological evolution in enhancing CQ as managerially relevant from the standpoint of individual enhancement and as a business leverage mechanism that helps defend and create competitive advantage across borders (Jiang et al., 2023).

Navigate challenges and future studies directions: Technologies may be instrumental in realizing innovative pathways for cultural learning and engagement. Still, miscommunication using technology in (cross-cultural) settings remains a risk that psychologists should consider while investigating and applying problem-based solutions toward this paradoxical end state (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Anglani et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2023). These substitutions, solutions, and cultural biases in design and implementation call for culturally aware, inclusive digital tools. This thesis proposes that future studies explore how to (1) pursue digital ecosystems that integrate inclusive global business practices, (2) develop a culturally intelligent workforce through market-based interventions, and (3) close the digital divide so that opportunity for CQ development is equalized regardless of socio-economic context.

To conclude, the strategic incorporation of digital platforms influences cultural understanding. Digital platforms serve as dynamic tools that necessitate continuous practices for enterprises to nurture and utilize CQ in international business activities. Based on a body of research and cases, this narrative explores how technology plays a pivotal role in enhancing cultural intelligence. Additionally, this narrative explores implications and prospects for challenges presented by technology to the promise of global e-commerce (Ang et al., 2007; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Botha et al., 2009; Ang et al., 2011; Hu et al., 2020; Szymanski et al., 2020; Heflin Indvik & Bess France, 2020; Minbaeva et al., 2021; Ermasova et al., 2021; Tahirkheli, 2022; Wang et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2023; Haris et al. 2023; Elfakharani, 2024). Together, these studies highlight the variety of technology uses supporting cultural awareness and intelligence, from a better understanding of how to promote intercultural competencies in educational institutions to ensuring strategic business success through digital transformation.

2.3.2 The impact of technology and globalization on cultural intelligence

Growing globalization has made cultural synergy a key factor in business success. This subsection integrates data from selected studies to analyze globalization and cultural sensitivity in the business environment, primarily explaining the impact of cultural intelligence platforms in international business.

Arman and Adair (2012) emphasize the importance of understanding cross-cultural variances, such as time, as they significantly influence the dynamics that multinational team members form when interacting. They address anecdotal examples of how different time orientations affect deadlines and team milestones while highlighting how cultural intelligence platforms can help address these common challenges and layout data to guide them further. Cultural intelligence platforms' concepts were particularly insightful, suggesting that their role as solution slides is to bridge gaps in understanding and improve team efficiency and collaboration. Examining the role of technology, Botha et al. (2009) described mobile technology as bridging cultural gaps, citing examples of

how technology has overcome language issues and created mutual understanding in multicultural teams. This insight highlights the prospect of cultural intelligence portals offering comparable capabilities and facilitating cross-cultural communications that will lead to successful international ventures.

Additionally, Caliguri et al. (2020) address instances where HR practice has evolved in line with local cultural understandings—adaptive responses that are primarily strategic, reflecting the constant challenges created by a pandemic. Thus, this example demonstrates how cultural intelligence platforms can help develop and institute HR policies and practices that are culturally sensitive—a critical step to maintaining organizational peace and operating smoothly while the world is in chaos. First, from the perspective of multicultural virtual teams, Chang et al. (2023) recently proposed a conceptual framework that suggests embracing multiculturalism can enhance the team's performance to a greater extent. This is akin to the meta-analytic review of cultural intelligence and performance by Cui and Awa (2012), who posit that culturally intelligent leadership can drive global business to outperform its competitors. This intersection thus showcases how cultural intelligence platforms provide dedicated services to prepare leaders with the skills to drive success for multicultural teams.

Finally, Cheng and Chen (2008) study the effects of information and communication technology on cultural intelligence and its role in international business decision-making. Their research captures instances where culturally intelligent applications of strategic technologies filled cultural gaps, raising the prospect that cultural intelligence platforms can provide a means to make genuinely informed global decisions and develop deeper cross-cultural understanding in an increasingly globalized business context.

To sum up, Arman and Adair (2012), Botha et al. (2009), Caligiuri et al. (2020), Chang et al. (2023), and Cheng and Chen (2008) all highlight the critical importance of cultural intelligence and sensitivity in a global business context. These research studies support the use of culturally sensitive techniques and emphasize the importance of cultural

intelligence platforms in improving organizational efficiency, effective communication, and success in today's global marketplace.

2.4 Theoretical framework

This thesis research has developed the theoretical framework to understand how CQ digital platforms enhance cultural awareness and intercultural proficiency. The framework focuses on several crucial elements derived by synthesizing the literature on CQ and digital technology applications in global business settings. Hence, this framework cohesively connects CQ elements with digital platforms' operational characteristics to promote intercultural perspective and competence among professionals. Each component explains how it contributes to answering the research question (***How do digital cultural intelligence platforms promote cultural awareness and intercultural proficiency to professionals working in business settings with global reach?***)

What is the role of cultural intelligence (CQ)? CQ is a 4D construct and provides an end-to-end process for individuals to adapt to new cultures (Earley & Ang, 2003). This framework proposes (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008) that CQ is shaped by cognitive, motivational, behavioral and metacognitive dimensions. These dimensions are essential to increasing professionals' effectiveness in working across cultures. The cognitive component, for example, is cultural knowledge, which is vital to knowing norms and practices in many global business contexts. The motivational component is the innate desire to engage and learn from new cultural experiences. By contrast, the behavioral component focuses on the capacity to modify one's behavior in a way suitable for one's culture. The third aspect is that individuals can reflect on and adapt their cultural first impressions in real time when interacting with people from other cultures. Livermore (2010) refers to this ability as metacognitive CQ.

Integration with digital platforms: There is an abundance of resources and tools that help to scale up CQ acquisition (and application) speedily at work as various digital platforms

exist. They can offer scalable, immersive, and interactive cross-border learning experiences. For instance, virtual reality (VR) applications can pose complex intercultural situations where participants can rehearse safely (Adams & Webb 2016). Furthermore, the data-driven use of AI on these platforms can also supply personalized feedback and a customized learning path based on user input, which expedites the development of intercultural competence.

Enhancing intercultural awareness and proficiency: At the intersection of digital platforms and CQ lies the natural triadic relationship where informal learning spaces facilitate intercultural awareness and proficiency. They serve as vehicles for converting the more theoretical elements of CQ into tangible knowledge and skills. Virtual communication methods such as digital discussion forums and collaboration tools facilitate the instantaneous ability of actors to share perspectives that implicitly develop aspects of cultural dialogue through real-time communication and collaborative work across different cultures (Rockstuhl et al., 2011). Besides, the realities of digital platforms serve continuous availability of an abundance of cultural content material archives and training modules frequently up to date with contemporary shifts in cultural tendencies and updates.

Practical and theoretical evidence: Empirically, practical and theoretical evidence supports the effectiveness of using digital platform data in cultural intelligence training. Research shows that technology-enhanced learning environments enhance the effectiveness of cultural training (Spreitzer et al., 2021). Besides, the literature offers theoretical insights, suggesting that the dynamic capabilities of digital platforms can change traditional CQ training from a static, one-time event to an ongoing and adaptive process that changes across a professional's career (Livermore, 2011).

Hence, the theoretical framework explains how digital platforms can leverage cultural intelligence to develop global business practitioners with culturally astute thinking and intercultural competence. This thesis's framework integrates the best aspects of CQ with

the technological affordances inherent to digital platforms. This thesis's framework presents a structured path for enhancing critical skills essential for engaged and proficient behavior in intercultural settings, which have become increasingly important due to globalization. As a result, this comprehensive approach enables the CQ's application in different business scenarios. However, it also demonstrates a paradigm shift through technology to develop and nurture a culturally intelligent workforce. Thus, the following theoretical framework (Figure 6.) summarizes the literature reviewed in this thesis.

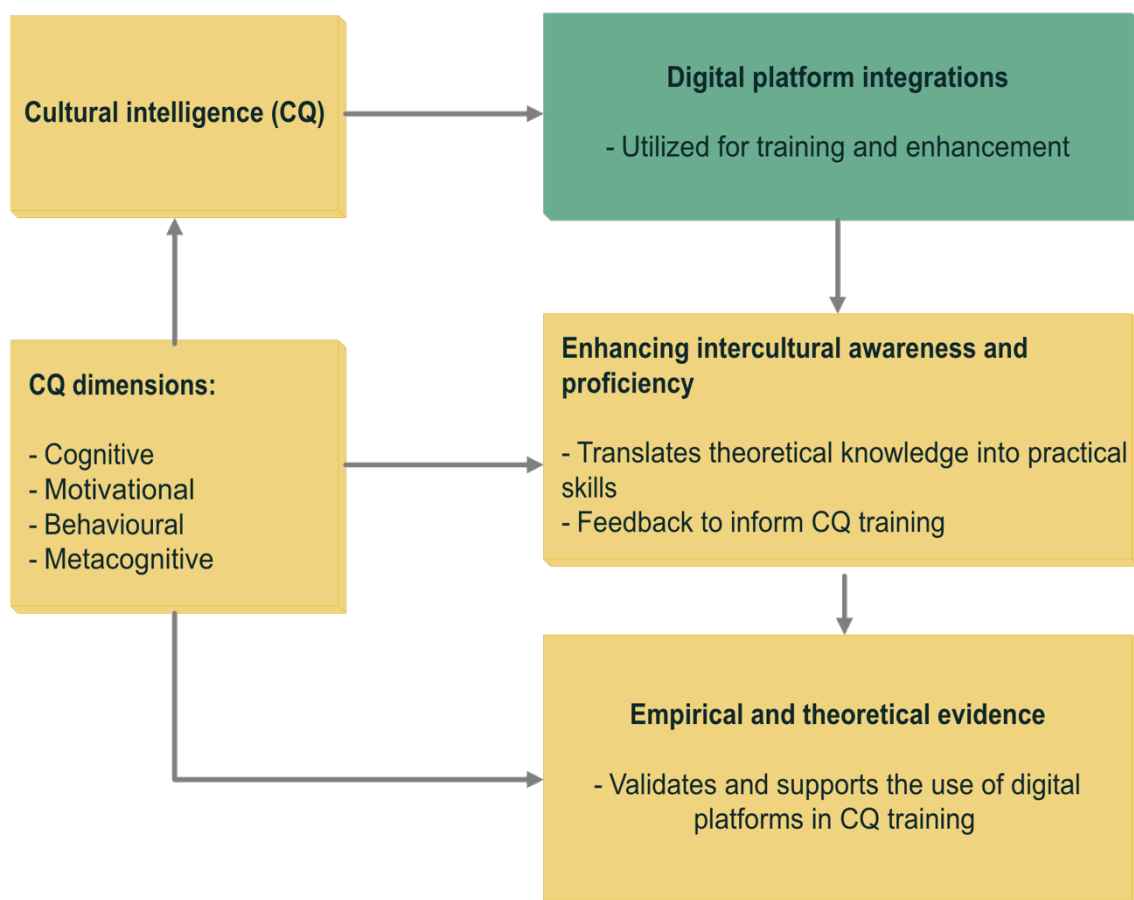


Figure 6. Theoretical framework on digital cultural intelligence (DCI)

3 METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical understanding of cultural intelligence. The above chapter examined extensive literature on the emergence of digital platforms tailored to promote cultural intelligence and highlighted the distinctive characteristics of this generation of technologies. This methodology section moves from conceptual exploration to empirical investigation to establish how effective digital platforms are in promoting cultural awareness as well as intercultural proficiency within the global business environment. Correspondently, this section presents the study's methodological framework, building on foundational literature, including the works of Ang and Van Dyne (2015) and Earley and Ang (2003). However, this includes the philosophical foundation, research design, sampling strategy, data collection, and analysis.

Additionally, it analyzes the ethical implications, describes the possible limitations, and predicts the reliability and validity of the findings. The primary research question guiding this inquiry is: ***How do digital cultural intelligence platforms promote cultural awareness and intercultural proficiency to professionals working in business settings with global reach?*** This question is critical in today's global economic environment, where success relies heavily on cultural awareness. Furthermore, this methodology will present an insightful understanding of how technological tools function as an exceptional force for improving cultural intelligence, which results in improved cross-cultural interactions in global settings.

3.1 Philosophical assumptions

The methodology of this study is based on a synthesis of the philosophical assumptions inferred from a vast body of literature in the fields of cultural intelligence, intercultural relations, and organizational behavior across diverse cultures. Cultural intelligence (CQ), the core theory describing this ability to connect and collaborate cross-culturally, is

about relating to and working effectively across cultures (Earley & Ang, 2003). Ang and Van Dyne (2015) considered the development of this ability as a path that could elevate intercultural effectiveness at a global level and sensitivity (Bennett, 1986). This study is based on the philosophy that cultural intelligence is not a natural attribute but rather a skill that can be developed through exposure, education, and experience in reflective practice (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Kistyanto et al., 2022).

After a review of the literature by Beugelsdijk et al. (2017), this paper recognizes that the influence of organizational behavior differs significantly across cultures and, in their global business impact, relies uniquely on such differing effects. It emphasizes cultural intelligence based on national cultural dimensions. Connerley and Pedersen (2005) and Crowne (2008) explain that as front-line managers adapt to operating in diverse cultures, they gain awareness, knowledge, and skills about these cultural groups, enhancing their ability to assume leadership roles in multicultural or global environments.

The study adopted a philosophical perspective of pragmatism to integrate quantitative and qualitative perspectives, thereby enhancing our understanding of how cultural intelligence platforms influence global business practices (Yu, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2017). This perspective acknowledges that a single methodological lens can never fully capture the multifaceted nature of cultural interactions. The literature suggests that developing cultural intelligence among global business professionals requires a comprehensive strategy incorporating training, experience, and reflective practices (Koo Moon et al., 2012; Presbitero, 2016; 2018; 2020; Presbitero & Teng-Calleja, 2019; Malay et al., 2023).

In addition, Meyer (2014) and Morales-Alonso et al. (2021) proposed that effectively mastering the global business environment is essential to understanding and bridging cultural gaps. This requires a deep appreciation of cultural intelligence as a dynamic, context-sensitive competency (Ng et al., 2012). This methodological chapter's philosophical assumptions stem from the conviction that enhancing cross-cultural

competence and effectiveness in a globalized business environment necessitates the development of CQ. This study is based on the premise that developing cultural intelligence requires an integrated strategy that combines theoretical knowledge with practical experience and reflection to navigate the complexity of global interactions effectively.

3.2 Research approach

This study has a mixed-method research strategy (qualitative and quantitative) that focuses on cultural intelligence platforms as tools to develop cultural awareness in international business settings. Mixed-method research provides the added benefit of triangulating data from different sources for a more well-rounded exploration of complex phenomena and higher validity of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This study collected quantitative data using surveys with validated scales developed by Ang et al. (2007) and Subramaniam et al. (2011). Such surveys are closed-ended response methods, and the current study used a statistical analysis of data from structured surveys to measure the effectiveness of digital platforms in developing CQ. Such methodology corresponds to the systematic quantitative approaches outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), allowing for a careful analysis of CQ development.

Semi-structured interviews and case studies collected qualitative data to complement the quantitative approach, enabling a more in-depth exploration of how professionals experience and perceive the role of digital platforms in enhancing their intercultural proficiency. This method draws on techniques outlined by Bartunek and Seo (2001) and Graneheim and Lundman (2004) for conducting interviews that yield rich contextual insights into personal experiences. These qualitative findings provide an understanding of team cross-cultural contexts (Adair et al., 2013) and contribute to the larger conversation on cross-cultural leadership (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Barakat et al., 2015). Hence, this allows the study to showcase a more triangulated view, where statistical

evidence can back up individual narratives (or vice versa) and complementary angles. This is consistent with the view of Engle et al. (2014) on the nuanced dynamics of cultural competence development in global teams, based on research results and suggestions for a mixed-method approach (Wang et al., 2014).

The research is based on a pragmatic philosophical assumption that digital tools can contribute to CQ by facilitating real-time, interactive learning experiences in diverse professional contexts. Caligiuri and Cascio (1998), Bücken et al. (2014), and Caligiuri and Tarique (2012) all argued that digital platforms were indispensable for enhancing cultural adaptability—a critical professional competence in today's interconnected global market, supporting this assumption. Finally, this mixed-method approach to the study tackles the complexity of business interactions globally and represents empirically based recommendations for possible advancements in digital cultural intelligence platforms. By employing this methodology, which integrates qualitative and quantitative data, this study seeks to reduce cultural naivety in business settings, offering targeted insights for enhancing CQ development through digital means.

3.2.1 Cases and individuals' respondents' selection

A strategic approach to understanding the impact of cultural intelligence digital platforms in global business settings guides this study's selection of case companies, digital platforms, and individual respondents. The sample selection process, following Creswell (2005) and Sekaran and Bougie (2016) guidelines, is purposeful and targeted at entities. Specifically, this process targets individuals who use these platforms in various international business contexts and business professionals who regularly travel internationally to participate in global conferences, international meetings, collaborations, contract negotiations, and onsite projects. This thesis examines the application of cultural intelligence strategies at the organizational level, focusing on educational institutions and multinational corporations. How do these strategies work? The author focuses on these organizations and their use of digital cultural intelligence

platforms to improve their professionals' cultural consciousness and intercultural competence.

In addition, the authors chose these educational institutions and case companies based on their involvement in digital cultural intelligence platforms and global reach, thus ensuring multicultural interactions. Jankowicz (2005) and Zikmund et al. (2013) used these case companies to demonstrate the effectiveness of cultural intelligence platforms across different industries in a study. By utilizing this diversity, this research investigates how sector-specific characteristics influence the effectiveness of these platforms. The five case companies in this study all include three regionally distinct institutions from different geographic regions. There are two from Northern Europe: Scandinavian universities, where (University A) strongly emphasizes sustainable business, energy, and society, and (University B) focuses on higher education, research development, and innovations. The third is a Southern European university that supports creating and developing business projects in the arts, sciences, and technologies (University C).

Moreover, the companies involved are leaders in their respective fields. Company A is a multinational technology company focusing on sustainable technology and service innovation. The other organization (Company B) provides specialized support for internationalization and export services for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Educational institutions and case companies use the code names listed below for confidentiality reasons. More importantly, the author of this paper selected the institutions and companies mentioned above to provide various perspectives on integrating cultural intelligence into their operations, especially in terms of international collaboration and market expansion. Senior candidates from these organizations provided insights into the practical uses and challenges of integrating cultural intelligence into their work. As a result, the author chose the interviewees or their contributions to this initiative.

Professionals working with these digital platforms in their daily operations select individual participants through snowball sampling and direct invitation. Precisely, the objective was to maximize diversity in cultural backgrounds, professional roles, and experience levels to ensure an extensive understanding of the platforms' impact (Creswell, 2005; Ary et al., 2013). This study recruited respondents from various backgrounds to enhance the relevance of the findings to real-world applications. Additionally, the choice of this group depended on their substantial demand and frequent interaction with cross-cultural communication tools, since this consistent engagement makes them the best sample to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of digital platforms in fostering cultural awareness and sensitivity among global business professionals. Table 4. below displays the details of the interviews, including the number of participants and their professional positions within the business environment.

Table 4. List of interview participants

Participants	Position
1	Senior Development Engineer Manager & Noise Expert (Finland)
2	Senior Chief Project Engineer (Finland)
3	Senior Development Manager & Noise Expert (Finland)
4	Documentation Engineer (Finland)
5	Dean (Finland)
6	Entrepreneurship Programme Manager (Portugal)
7	Senior Business Management & Marketing Lecturer (Finland)
8	Senior Specialist in the Innovation & Ecosystem (Finland)
9	Senior Business Management & Marketing Lecturer (Finland)
10	Senior Specialist in the Innovation & Ecosystem (Finland)

3.3 Data collection

As previously mentioned, this study used a mixed method of data collection. The integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis led to the development of both

summary and in-depth data. A structured survey questionnaire was the method's core for gathering quantitative data. The study collected qualitative insights through semi-structured interviews. The survey measured several aspects of CQ (i.e., intercultural communication efficiency and perceived success of digital cultural intelligence platforms). Due to its flexibility and accessibility, the study administered the survey through Google Forms, which included closed-ended questions (multiple choice, yes/no), open-ended questions, and Likert scale question types (to inquire about diverse opinions from respondents), as seen below in Table 5.

Table 5. Question types and their purpose in the survey.

Detailed question type	Description
Closed-Ended Questions	The closed-ended questions are in the form of multiple-choice and dichotomous (yes/no) questions designed to collect demographic data, industry experience with CQ, and awareness of CQ platforms.
Likert Scale Questions	These questions were used to determine whether digital platforms effectively enhance cultural awareness, intercultural communication skills, and satisfaction among their users. Response options of participants were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
Open-Ended Questions	Open-ended questions that sought in-depth information on recommendations, strengths, and weaknesses. When asked to provide specific examples of how digital platforms had helped them manage or improve their capacity to navigate cultural differences, respondents provided specified examples.

In addition, the thesis's author distributed the survey to professionals from various fields and carried out the snowball sampling method, encouraging initial participants to refer colleagues or contacts who also used digital platforms for cultural intelligence development. This approach effectively reached niche target groups, including those with technology, finance, and international consulting backgrounds. According to Goodman (2011) and Handcock and Gile (2011), snowball sampling is a reliable approach

for expanding the pool of respondents through social networks. This thesis categorizes the survey into five main sections, as listed in Figure 7. below.

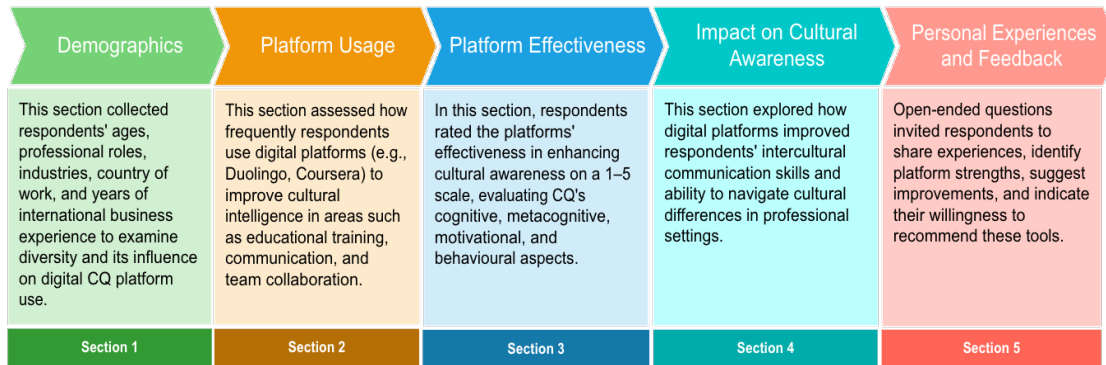


Figure 7. Survey overview: Five key sections

The survey covered four domains critical to the research objective, including the following: In the cultural awareness domain, these questions concentrate on how well QC digital platforms improved respondents' understanding of different cultures. The communication effectiveness domain questions assess whether the platforms facilitated better intercultural communication in professional settings. The survey asked respondents to rate the usability, accessibility, and engagement elements of the platform in the user experience and engagement area. Finally, in the fourth area, such as platform recommendation, the survey asked respondents whether they would recommend these digital cultural intelligence platforms to individuals and organizations in their industry and why they would do so.

Figure 8. displays the data collection timeline and responses from 14 May to 7 June 2024. Figure 8. depicts the relatively slow rate of responses at the outset but a rapid rise in responses corresponding with specific reminders and recruitment efforts during the second half of May. This strategy and follow-up reminders lead to the survey reaching a pseudo-plateau stage with 120 total responses, demonstrating the importance of effective survey distribution strategies in encouraging respondents (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Even though receiving reminders to

respond increases participation rates among respondents with varying levels of engagement, this time window provides us with an indication of their level of engagement.

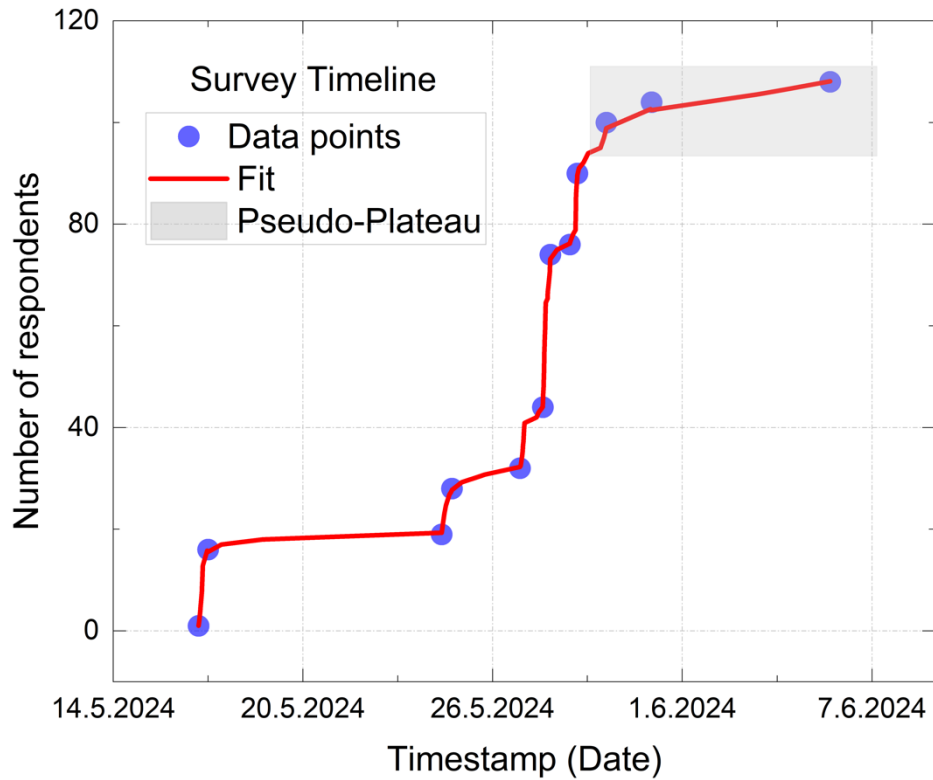


Figure 8. Survey timeline

3.4 Data analysis

Survey distribution and sample: As for distribution and sampling, the survey was distributed to professionals from various industries. For instance, the author of the thesis attended the Baltic-Nordic Acoustics Meeting 2024 (BNAM) thanks to the efforts of the event organizing committee, which included Henrik Möller (Co-Chair) and Liisa Kilpilehto (Co-Chair). This international conference, held every two years, brings together Nordic acousticians. Date: May 22-24, 2024, Location: Hanasaari, Espoo on the first day of the conference, the author introduced the topic, and Liisa Kilpilehto distributed a survey. After the event, Liisa Kilpilehto emailed the survey to all attendees and sent a reminder

email a few days later. In addition, the author attended the international tutor meeting at Vaasa University and distributed the survey to various international students via WhatsApp groups. Thus, the author captured diverse viewpoints from a sample group of business professionals from several sectors, including education, technology, construction, and consulting. This study obtained the data and then used thematic analysis to code and categorize it in Microsoft Excel. The exploration of thematic aspects allowed the identification of common themes among open-ended questions and insights into cultural preferences vis-à-vis platform accessibility. As a preliminary step for further data analysis based on the survey results, we created visualizations using the coded answers in Python.

Recruitment and sampling of participants: The author either directly invited participants in this thesis research or recruited them using a snowball sample. During the initial interview stage, the author asked participants to identify colleagues or business associates who were familiar with digital platforms and understood cultural intelligence. However, this worked incredibly well because it involved a niche research target; the number of people sampled on the platform is minimal. According to Goodman (2011) and Handcock and Gile (2011), snowball sampling involves using initial research participants to refer future ones, with the pool expanding incrementally through social networks. Hence, it was especially helpful in accessing professionals in specific fields in which cultural intelligence platforms are part of the system, such as technology, finance, and international consulting. Moreover, this research selected snowball sampling as an effective method for reaching respondents who are unlikely to be approached directly. Audemard (2020), therefore, suggests that this is an effective strategy for exploring such professional networks.

Interview details: This qualitative study engaged 10 participants in semi-structured interviews about their digital CQ platform experiences. The interviews conducted for this paper concentrate on the crucial aspects of these platforms in fostering cross-cultural competence, including the challenges encountered and the metrics used to measure

success. Thus, the conversations aimed to identify concrete business applications aligned with the study's goals. The interviews also delved into participant feedback on how these CQ platforms could evolve to provide better user service in global business contexts. The interviews began with a high-level overview of the research objectives. They ended by focusing on whether participants would recommend the platforms to their peers as a user experience.

This study conducted the interviews in English, using Microsoft Teams in video mode, during a single face-to-face session. Each session lasted between 19 and 66 minutes, and by using the video mode, the interviewer could observe body language and facial expressions, which added to the validity, accuracy, and reliability of responses. The author of this thesis recorded, transcribed, and analyzed all interviews using a six-step thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, this process included thoroughly understanding the data by repeated reading, creating initial codes, finding themes, naming these themes, and developing detailed analyses per theme. Thus, this structured approach provided a deeper understanding of user experiences and valuable insights into the practical applications of digital CQ platforms. Table 6. lists the interview details, including the case company, number of interviewees, positions, dates, and durations. At the same time, Table 7. provides an overview of the case companies and educational institutes involved.

Table 6. Interviews details from educational institutions

Educational Institutions	Interviewee(s)	Position(s)	Date	Interview Duration
University A	1	Dean	16.05.2024	58 minutes
University C	2	Entrepreneurship Programme Manager	16.05.2024	33 minutes
University B	3	Senior Business Management & Marketing Lecturer	16.05.2024	66 minutes
University A	4	Senior Specialist in the Innovation & Ecosystem	17.05.2024	38 minutes

Table 7. Interviews details from case companies

Case Companies	Inter-viewee(s)	Position(s)	Date	Interview Duration
Company A	1	Senior Development Engineer Manager & Noise Expert	01.05.2024	41 minutes
Company A	2	Senior Chief Project Engineer	03.05.2024	38 minutes
Company A	3	Senior Development Manager & Noise Expert	06.05.2024	19 minutes
Company A	4	Documentation Engineer	07.05.2024	37 minutes
Company A	5	General Manager of Technical Sales Support	10.05.2024	30 minutes
Company B	6	CEO	14.05.2024	27 minutes

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Quantitative findings

The quantitative analysis classified the study into various sections. Each focused on specific aspects, such as demographics, platform effectiveness, or usage patterns. However, the author visualized the interlinkages between age, industry, location, and platform impact. Adair et al. (2013) and Ang and Van Dyne (2015), among many others, have shown that cultural intelligence is salient to leadership effectiveness and cross-cultural interaction.

Section 1: Summary of respondents' demographics

This section presents the survey respondents' demographic statistics. From the survey, the respondents provided insightful information on their professional roles and experience using cultural intelligence digital platforms, their cultural and geographic locations, and the industry in which they operate. In this view, Findlay and Kowbel said that diversity, whether from age or otherwise, is a critical component of business success; however, communication across generations remains a significant obstacle. This is evident from the demographic breakdown of the respondents as outlined in the inner pie chart Figure 9. (Summary of respondent demographics) below, where 45% fall between the ages of 25 and 34, while 24.3% of the respondents fall in the range of 35-44; 16% are in the age bracket of 45-54, and 13% are in the age group of 55 years and above.

The lowest representation is among these age groups—under 25 years old. Respondents were predominantly representative of the 25-35 and 35-44 age groups, with their numbers accounting for greater than half of respondents. This group, which has either early or even mid-stage careers and is often looking to learn and use new technologies, is a pivotal part of the world workforce demographic. As a result, exposure to diverse cultures in the global and interconnected environment makes them more flexible from a business perspective. The pie chart at the outer layer shows that 74% of respondents

belong to Europe (a significant portion of this study sample belongs to Europe's geographic regions). Geographic diversity also comes from the Americas (11%), Africa (10%), and Asia-Pacific (5%).

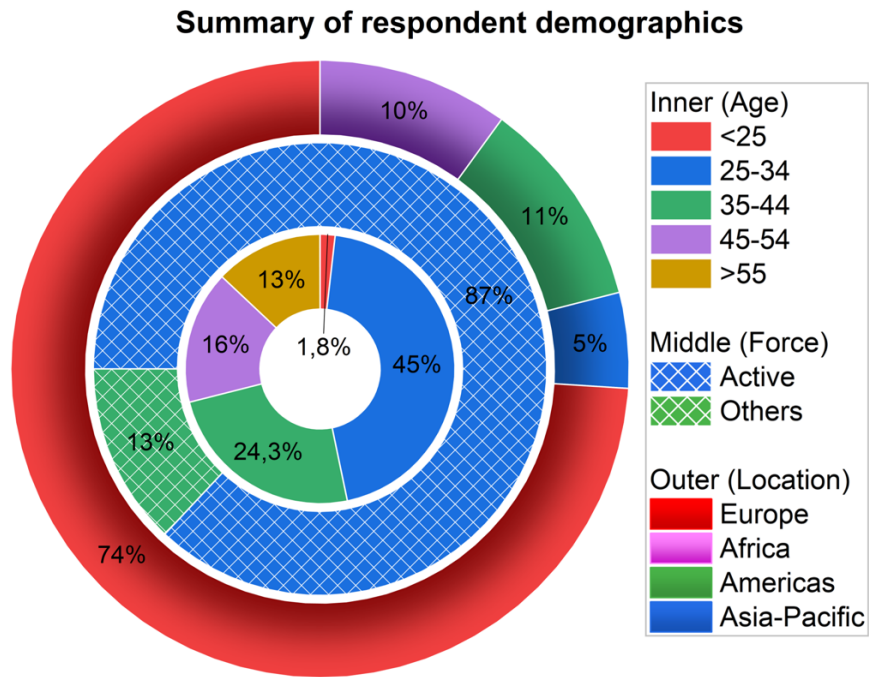


Figure 9. Summary of respondent demographics

Furthermore, Figure 10. (professional roles and use of digital platforms) below depicts the distribution of respondents across four leading professional roles: technical and engineering (38%), managerial and executive (27%), academic and research (12%), and creative and support (23%). The largest group was those under the technical and engineering category. The visualization further categorizes respondents as those who use digital platforms (shown in green) and those who do not (shown in purple). 31% of the technical and engineering professionals use digital platforms. Moreover, 7% of these professionals acknowledged that they do not use digital platforms. Adair and Brett (2005) argue that this may indicate that workers with more significant technical specializations adopt digital platforms to refine their work processes. For the managerial/executive and creative/support professionals, 23% and 18% utilize digital platforms, while 4% and 4% do not use digital platforms, respectively. Only 9% of the academic and research

professionals reported using digital platforms, while 1% did not, making them the least frequent users across all four roles. The ethical concerns in integrating digital platforms for academic collaboration and research, particularly in global multicultural teams, explain these reasons (Erez et al., 2013).

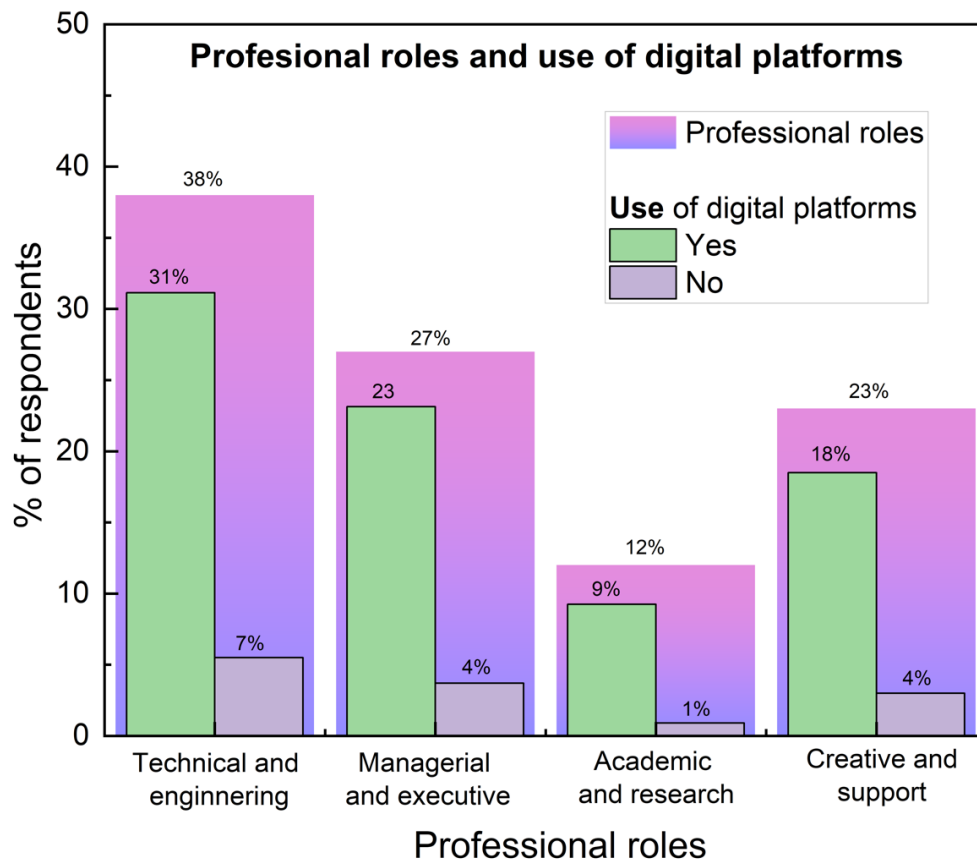


Figure 10. Professional roles and use of digital platforms

Below is Figure 11., which visualizes the effectiveness of platform usage in the industry. The perceived effectiveness is from 1 (ineffective) to 5 (extremely effective). The pie chart (Figure X) illustrates the years of experience working in an international business setting by participants: 34% indicated that they have between 1–5 years; 21% noted more than 20 years; 19% reported for both 11–20 and fewer than such and equal to sixteen (6-10); and only 7% displayed experience surveying shorter than one year.

Years of experience in international business settings

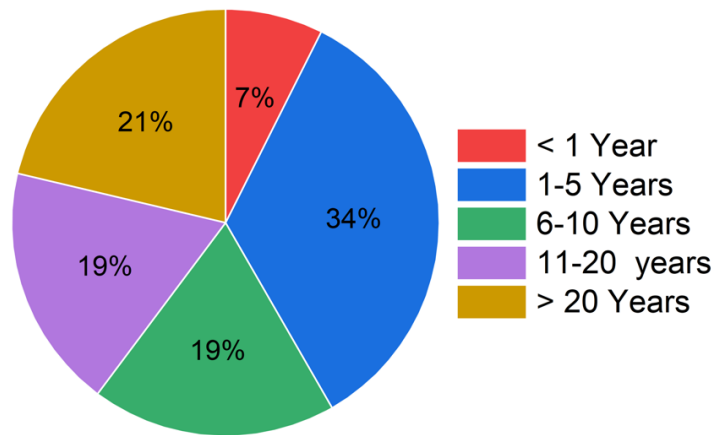


Figure 11. Years of experience in international business settings

Experience vs. CQ improvement: The heatmap (Figure 12.) below demonstrates how respondents across years of professional experience rate the ability of digital platforms to improve CQ. This study identifies essential patterns associating experience levels with the platform's perceived effectiveness and satisfaction across different experience levels.

Respondents with over 20 years of experience rated the platforms moderately effective (16%). Crowne (2008) argues that seasoned professionals rely more on personal cross-cultural experiences than digital tools. Hence, this finding suggests that these professionals may view these platforms as complementary. Even so, 4% found the platforms to be very effective, leading us to assume that even professionals with several years of experience can incorporate them into their work processes by finding ways in which they are valuable (Earley & Ang, 2003). Conversely, 14% of respondents with 1–5 years of experience rated them highly effective (4), compared to only 11%.

Consequently, early-career professionals find digital platforms particularly valuable in developing cultural competencies. As Erez et al. (2013) note, structured digital content can accelerate cultural adaptability for those new to cross-cultural environments. The results were more mixed—for respondents with 11–20 years of experience, 9% rated the

platforms highly effective, and 6.5% gave a moderate rating. These findings suggest that professionals within this mid-level experience range may hold mixed views on platform use, contingent on the contexts in which they use these platforms. This evidence indicates that professionals in this range had ambivalent attitudes toward platform use, depending on the contexts of platform use. This variation demonstrates different levels of comfort with digital tools and expectations for their realistic use in global contexts (Adair & Brett, 2005).

Finally, respondents with less than one year of experience split the ratings evenly. This distribution shows that the backgrounds of the participants might limit their broader interactions with different cultures and make it difficult for them to measure the impact of the platforms (Ang et al., 2007)—a digital platform to facilitate early career development. The research finds that digital platforms offer advantages to those starting their careers. Ang and Van Dyne (2015) argue that these tools help provide interactive and experiential opportunities that promote cognitive and behavioral CQ learning.

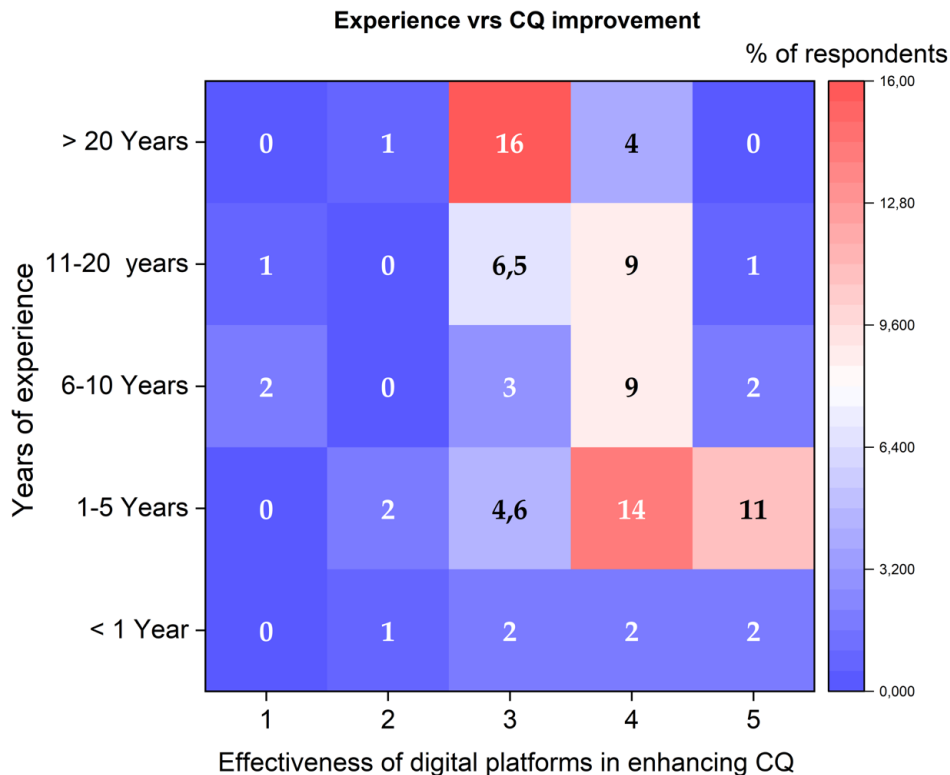


Figure 12. Experience vs. CQ improvement

For more experienced professionals, the lower ratings suggest more tailored content and region- and industry-specific modules to increase relevance and effectiveness (Adair et al., 2013; Erez et al., 2013; Crowne, 2023). Providing more personalized content could help organizations maximize the platforms' use across different experience levels; as Crowne (2023) suggests, well-designed features offering actionable insights can support experienced users and newcomers.

Section 2: Usage of digital cultural intelligence platforms

In this section, the author draws on examples from respondents' responses to explore digitally developed platforms designed to enhance cultural intelligence. Please see (Figures 12., Figure 13.) for the data visualization in this analysis. Refer to types of platforms, prevalence of use, and application domains, including global teams and cross-cultural projects.

Participants responded positively, as seen in Figure 12.; 82% confirmed using at least one or more platforms, while 18% did not respond. Such a level of nonresponse may reflect a lack of engagement or experience with these tools on the part of the respondent or reluctance to report the use of these platforms for reasons other than those mentioned earlier.

Types of digi. platforms used by respondents

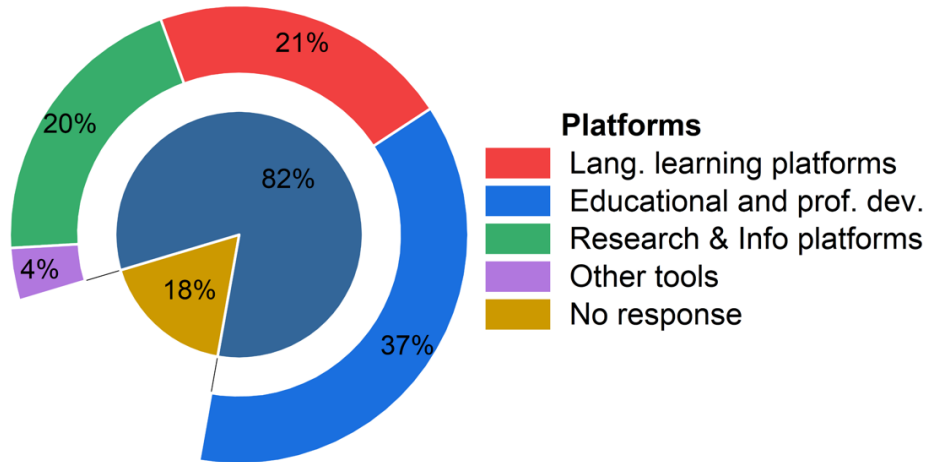


Figure 13. Platforms used and types of digital platforms used by respondents.

Going forward, we see different types of digital platforms used here, as shown in Figure 12. 21% of the respondents use language learning platforms. These platforms, such as Duolingo, are renowned for enhancing language skills and intercultural communication, essential components of cultural intelligence (Ang & Dyne, 2015). On the other hand, 37% of respondents chose educational and professional development platforms as their preferred option. Platforms (e.g., Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, and similar tools) play a crucial role in facilitating the development of skills required for cross-cultural effectiveness in organizational contexts (Erez et al. 2013), which makes it a natural choice for the target professionals who desire to improve their CQ competencies along with combining their skills that may be relevant to specific industries (Ang & Dyne, 2015). Research and information platforms (20%) include Google Scholar and similar services. The uniqueness of these platforms also addresses a cognitive component of cultural intelligence (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004) since they provide knowledge about other cultures. The others (4%) wrote other tools that do not belong to the primary category; such niche platforms can also have a role in CQ development on special occasions (e.g., contract negotiation or teamwork) (Crowne, 2023).

Usage and frequency: Figure 13. illustrates respondents' frequency and platform usage. Of the 82% of respondents who confirmed their use of digital platforms, 13% reported daily use, potentially reflecting the practical challenges of incorporating CQ tools into daily routines. Moreover, 30% and 22.7% have shown that they use it weekly, whereas 22.7% use it monthly. In contrast, 42.5% of respondents reported using educational and professional tools weekly, while 45.5% reported using them monthly. The other 25% said they seldom use digital platforms. Although they use digital tools to learn about their culture, the behavior is not as uniform. A higher rate may reflect periodical substitution and limited accessibility in the rare use category (Adair et al., 2013). Not using platform interventions may limit access to or awareness of these resources (Asad & McManus, 2021). This will allow companies to customize their digital offerings more appropriately for wide-ranging users.

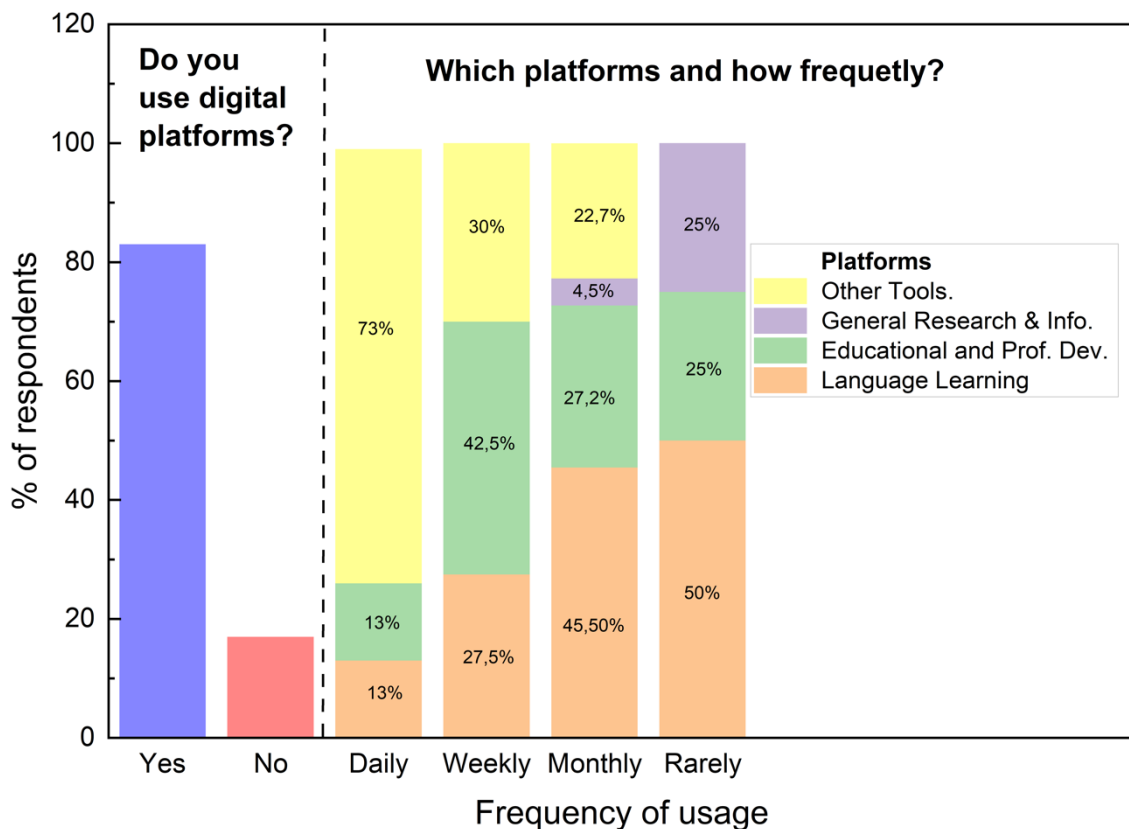


Figure 14. Digital platforms used and frequency

Diverse use of digital platforms: Figure 14. demonstrates that communication (50%) and educational training (40%) are the most prevalent uses of digital platforms. Erez et al. (2013) emphasize that these platforms foster collaboration across geographic and cultural boundaries. Similarly, Crowne (2008) adds that digital platforms allow professionals to communicate virtually simultaneously with other professionals globally. Moreover, educational training through digital platforms has increasingly become vital in corporate and academic settings to promote the development of CQ and enable professionals to interact effectively in a cross-cultural context (Ang et al., 2011). Crown (2023) argues that digital platforms are crucial in managing global teams; as indicated in the figure below, 35% of respondents use them for team collaboration and 30% for project management.

Thus, Gibson and Gibbs (2006) emphasize that digital tools enable innovation and coordination in distributed teams to succeed in cross-cultural projects. In this study, responses by the respondents show that business functions like marketing (20%), sales (15%), and customer service (10%) use these platforms to gain more ground. Soares et al. (2007) argue that these digital tools enable organizations to tailor their strategies to local market conditions and highly engage culturally diverse customers. On the other hand, respondents primarily use these tools for work-related purposes, as indicated by their lower use for personal projects and general information. Thus, previous researchers (e.g., Adair and Brett, 2005; Ang & Dyne, 2015) argued that these tools act more on structured professional interactions rather than informal or personal use. These findings, which draw from earlier theoretical frameworks on the role of CQ in enhancing team dynamics, indicate that digital platforms significantly enhance collaboration, communication, and learning in multicultural settings. There is a need for more informed analysis to establish how effectiveness varies across different industries (Adair et al., 2013).

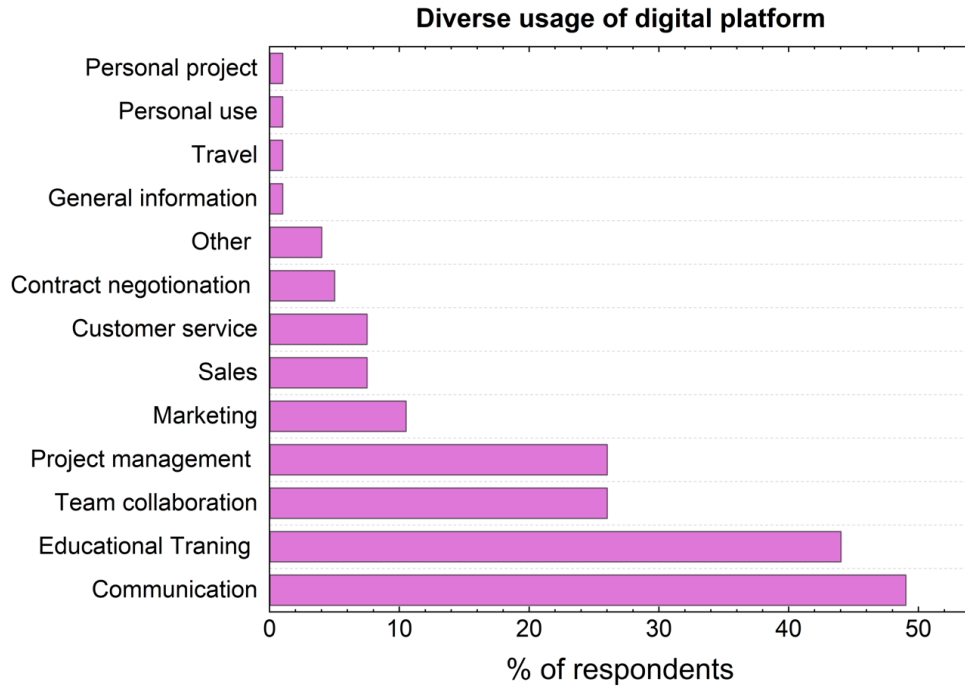


Figure 15. Diverse usage of digital platforms

Section 3: Effectiveness of digital platforms

The third part addresses the success of digital platforms in developing CQ, which is represented by the below graphs (Figure 15., Figure 16.)

Figure 15 shows that 41% of respondents consider effective digital platforms (level 4). Although 34% scored the same as moderately effective (3%) CQ external platforms, most respondents believe that resources they utilized through CQ provide value. These tools improve CQ's cognitive and metacognitive components by providing users access to cultural knowledge, experience, and understanding. Such tools enrich CQ's cognitive and metacognitive aspects through exposure to cultural knowledge and insights. 17% of respondents rated these platforms as very effective (5), which means they are helpful; however, only a few users are experiencing the full benefits they intended. Studies by Adair and Brett (2005) and Chen (2015) show that users perceive such platforms as more effective when they provide practical, authentic features, such as simulated cross-cultural scenarios or live cross-cultural exchanges. Earley and Mosakowski (2004) argue

that practical application and behavioral adaptation are essential for developing CQ; adding these aspects may enhance such tools' effectiveness and user engagement.

The lower end of the effectiveness scale shows that 3% of respondents rated the platforms as ineffective (1), while 4% rated them as slightly effective (2). According to Crowne (2008), these ratings suggest the presence of multiple barriers, such as insufficient platform functionality to support behavioral adaptation. Correspondingly, Earley and Mosakowski (2004) discussed technical shortcomings that might contribute to a discrepancy between the effectiveness experienced in an experimental context versus in real-world contexts, which also clarifies users' poorer perceived effectiveness. Bennett (2008) and Erez et al. (2013) stated that form(s) of "translating knowledge of culture to competence" relies on behavioral and motivational components, which these platforms may underdeveloped. As the distribution of responses shows, these digital platforms are valuable tools for improving CQ, but there is still room for improvement. Ang et al. (2015) pointed out that digital platforms have widely opened cultural visibility but have implemented more independent and passive engagement strategies, requiring dynamic approaches to realize the full potential of cultural training. Enhancing the interactivity, real-life application, and personalization of pathways might set users up for better experiences on the platform. Costers et al. (2019) state that live feedback should be considered an added value for the fundamentals of interaction mechanisms and certain learning domains.

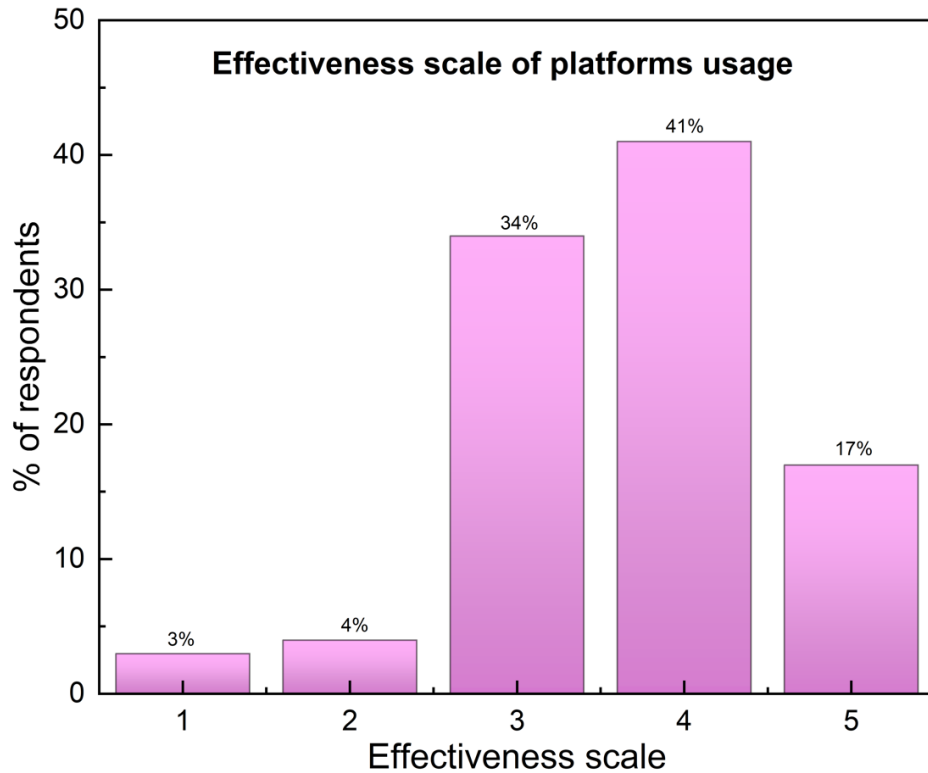


Figure 16. Effectiveness scale of digital platform usage

The analysis of platform performance in various industries, Figure 16., illustrates the effectiveness of digital platform use across multiple sectors, with ratings ranging from 1 (ineffective) to 5 (extremely effective). Respondents belong to the education, technology, healthcare, manufacturing, finance, media, and energy sectors.

Among the education and academia sectors, the platform's effectiveness received level 3 (effective) from most respondents, with many rating it higher. According to Erez et al. (2013), many technology and IT service sector respondents rated the platform highly effective (4 or 5). Digital platforms have been deeply integrated into technology fields, making them essential for collaboration and innovation (Ang & Dyne, 2015). Respondents divided the healthcare and life sciences ratings from medium (level 3) to higher effectiveness. Crowne (2008) observes that the healthcare industry widely adopts digital tools such as telemedicine, although some lower ratings may be due to regulatory challenges. The manufacturing, construction, and engineering industries rated platform

effectiveness mostly at levels 3 and 4. These sectors increasingly use digital platforms for cross-border collaboration and project management, though integration challenges in field-based operations may limit their effectiveness (Adair et al., 2013).

Several respondents rated finance, legal, and business services at level 4. Ang & Van Dyne (2011) describe these industries as digital-native due to their heavy reliance on automated processes, data-driven decision-making using various technological tools, and integrating these platforms into their businesses. Further, nearly all respondents rated the effectiveness of the platforms with a rating of 4 in the media, communications and entertainment fields. The field is so dependent on technology that digital tools are at the heart of content creation and distribution (Adair & Brett, 2005). Respondents went back and forth between medium (level 3) and high (level 4) for energy and environmental sciences. Digital platforms are pivotal for coordinating environmental works and energy alliances (Ang et al., 2007). Responses from other industries varied, with various ratings reflecting different uses and applications of digital platforms across sectors.

Relevant literature suggests that incorporating industry needs for CQ can improve the diversity and effectiveness of platforms across sectors. Technology, finance, and media are more efficient since their daily operations are more digitally driven and thus report higher effectiveness (Ang & Van Dyne, 2011). On the other hand, industries (e.g., healthcare and manufacturing) have specific hurdles that could prevent organizations from adopting platforms that can cause middling ratings. Existing research suggests that CQ is critical to optimizing performance on digital platforms, especially for firms operating in culturally diverse sectors. Digital tools allow teams, leaders, or professionals to overcome cross-cultural challenges and enhance communication, decision-making ability, and productivity (Crowne, 2008; Adair et al., 2013).

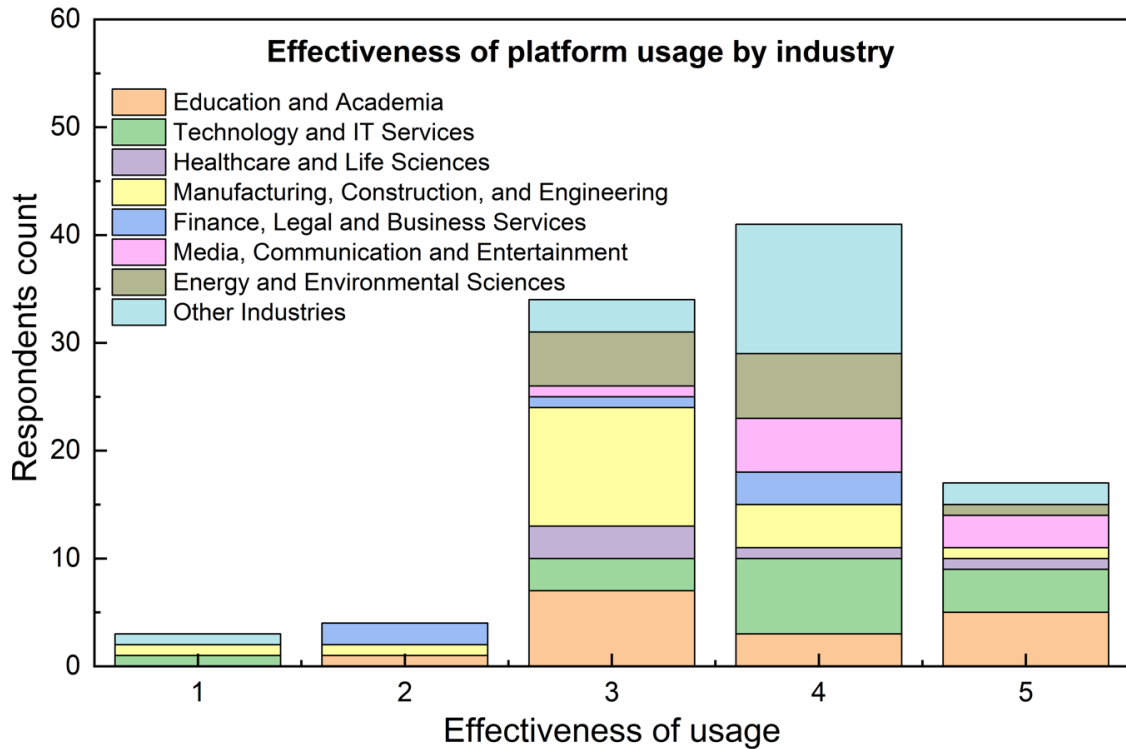


Figure 17. Effectiveness of platform usage by industry

Respondents reported that digital platforms play the role of advanced CQ in shaping and developing multiple aspects of cultural intelligence (CQ). Figure 17. shows differences in the dimensions of CQ (cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral).

Cognitive development: 87% of respondents confirmed that digital platforms improved their cognitive CQ, which refers to their understanding of different cultures. Cognitive development is the basis of cultural flexibility as it allows individuals to comprehend different cultural norms, values, and systems (Ang & Van Dyne, 2011). Digital platforms serve structured content that helps users learn about cultural norms, values, and systems (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Therefore, this high number implies that these platforms successfully educate their users about global culture.

Metacognitive development: 35% of respondents reported development in metacognitive CQ, which involves thinking critically about and managing cultural biases. According to Crown (2008), digital platforms accomplish the task of distributing cultural

knowledge well, but they fail at promoting flexibility and reflections on cultural assumptions. According to Chen (2015), the ability to change perspectives helps in higher-order cultural tests and is thus an imperative component of metacognitive intelligence. Erez et al. (2013) suggest that these platforms integrate further self-assessment tools and reflexive practices to assist users in developing their metacognitive skills.

Motivational and behavioral development: This thesis reported improvement in CQ's motivational (43%) and behavioral (42%). These elements denote an awareness of interacting across cultures and the capacity to adjust behavior in an intercultural situation. Crowne (2008) and Chen (2015) found a massive gap between the actual cognitive knowledge of this construct area and practical applications in their life domain. Digital platforms should include experiential learning that promotes motivation and behavior change. Costers et al. (2019) propose a potential solution: adding interactive features (e.g., simulations or role-play) may be the bridge to users' realizing practical cultural competencies.

Finally, 13% of the respondents said that digital platforms play a role in all four dimensions of CQ (cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral). While this cohort is narrow, it suggests what digital tools can achieve in providing a learning experience as cohesive as possible—a standard that has yet to be mainstream. Adair and Brett (2005) state platforms must be more interactive and value/practically oriented for holistic CQ development assistance. Even though most digital platforms were solid about cognitive development, additional reflective and interactive tools are needed to boost the impact on the metacognitive, motivational and behavioral Qs (Adair & Brett, 2005).

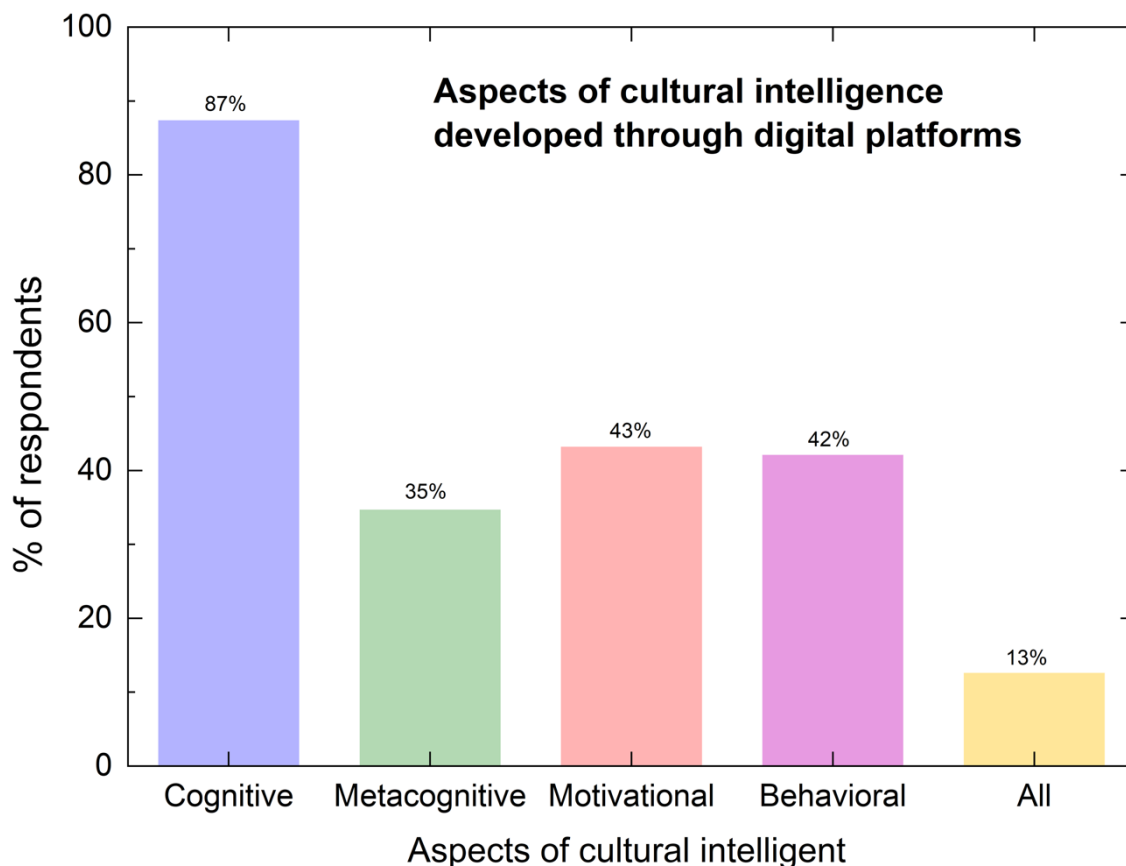


Figure 18. Aspects of CQ developed through digital platforms

Section 4: Impact assessment on cultural awareness proficiency

As illustrated in Figure 18., at least to a certain extent, digital platforms have enhanced intercultural communication among 94% of respondents. Among them, 37% reported a slight improvement, indicating that while digital tools simplify communicating smoothly digitally about different cultures, these tools may need to be more impactful to alter built-in behaviors. According to Crowne (2008), digital tools may introduce users to important cultural concepts but rarely prepare them for complex cultural dynamics. Crowne (2008) highlighted that, although digital tools introduce cultural concepts, they may only partially assist users in navigating complex cultural dynamics.

Alongside, 35% of respondents said their cultural understanding/communication was moderately improved. As a result, digital platforms play a clear role in facilitating cross-

cultural familiarity and dialogue. Platform-developed cultural intelligence instead promotes the ability to appreciate many points of view by making communication skilled (Ang and Van Dyne, 2015). 22% of respondents reported significant improvements, showing that digital platforms can effectively bridge cultural gaps. Chen (2015) suggests that platforms incorporating interactive and real-world scenarios (e.g., simulations and case studies) contribute more to significant improvements in intercultural communication.

On the other hand, 6% of respondents indicated no change in their communication abilities, possibly due to platform limitations that focus more on information delivery than on fostering practical communication skills. Erez et al. (2013) stress the importance of combining passive and active experiential learning to develop intercultural competence. Notably, 0% of respondents reported decreased communication abilities, which suggests that digital platforms are neutral and often beneficial in their impact. This finding supports the growing need for these platforms in today's interconnected world (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004).

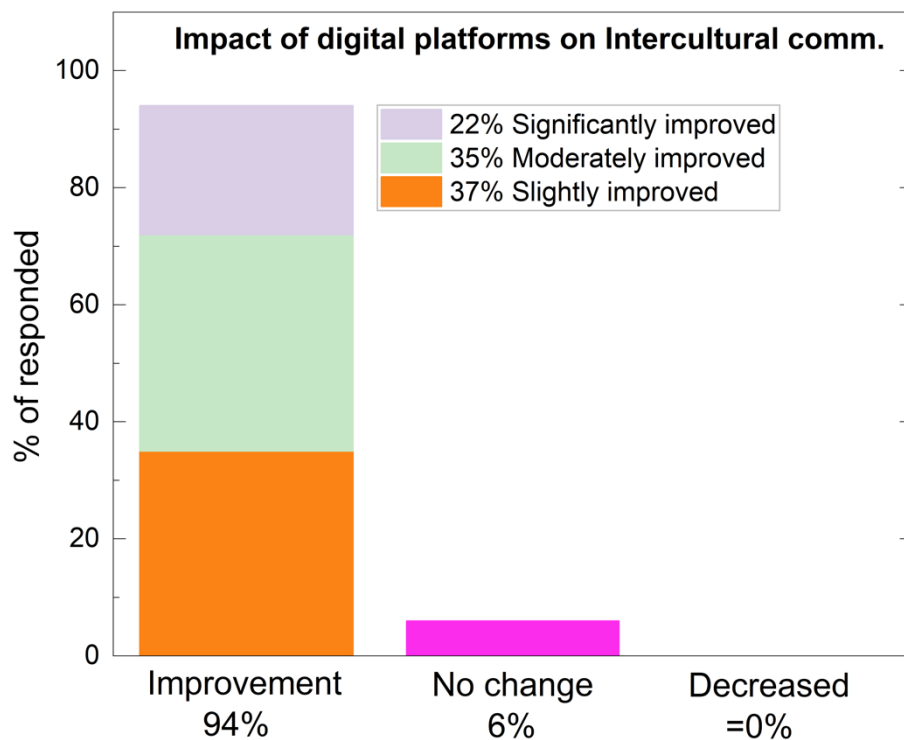


Figure 19. Impact on digital platforms on intercultural communication

Implications for the design of digital platforms: Some facets of communication improve more than others, which reveals that digital platforms enhance effective intercultural communication. Even so, the platforms must provide even more customized and engaging experiences to be worthwhile. Adair and Brett (2005) have argued that introducing interactivity, such as role-playing and simulations, can close the gap between marginal and substantive advances. Ang and Van Dyne (2015) also underscore that these interactive and experiential components, such as role-play scenarios in real-world contexts, should be involved in promoting intercultural interactions. According to Crowne (2008), this platform type can only achieve maximum utility through sustained active participation, requiring real-time interaction and application. Designers should enable users to acquire cultural knowledge and practice competence for cross-cultural scenarios.

Figure 19. shows the industry-wise impact of digital platforms on intercultural communication. When asked about education and academia, 16% of respondents said they were seeing improvements. This finding suggests the role of cultural exchange in these sectors, as professional and educational systems with intercultural components play a critical role in developing cognitive and cultural intelligence (Ang & Van Dyne, 2011). The healthcare, life sciences, manufacturing, construction, and engineering sectors have seen a 17% rise in gender equality, indicating the importance of cross-cultural communication in such globalized industries. Erez et al. (2013) also observed that digital platforms that increase cross-nation communication, a critical factor in culture for profitable venture management and borderless commerce, quickly provide access to markets for international projects.

Technology and IT Services see a 14% increase, emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural communication for global teams. Digital platforms can assist in bridging the gaps between cultures and work collaboratively with teams across geographical areas (Gibson

& Gibbs, 2006). In comparison, the growth of finance, legal, and business services has decreased to 9%, perhaps due to rigid regulatory systems that prevent robust intercultural interactions. Costers et al. (2019) argue that rigid communication structures reduce the effectiveness of digital platforms in these industries. Energy, environmental sciences, media, communication, and entertainment report lower levels of improvement (12% and 6%, respectively). Erez et al. (2013) explain that specialized sectors, such as energy, rely more heavily on in-person technical communication, which makes digital platforms less effective for cross-cultural engagement. The other industry (17%) shows the generalizability of digital platforms, despite their flexibility in facilitating intercultural communication across industries (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). In general, the efficacy of digital platforms changes considerably based on demand area. General sectors (education, healthcare, and technology) obtain higher margins, while industries with specialization (media and artefacts) have marginal gains. Arguably, tailoring to industry needs is the only way to improve the utility of these platforms further (Crown et al., 2008; Erez et al., 2013).

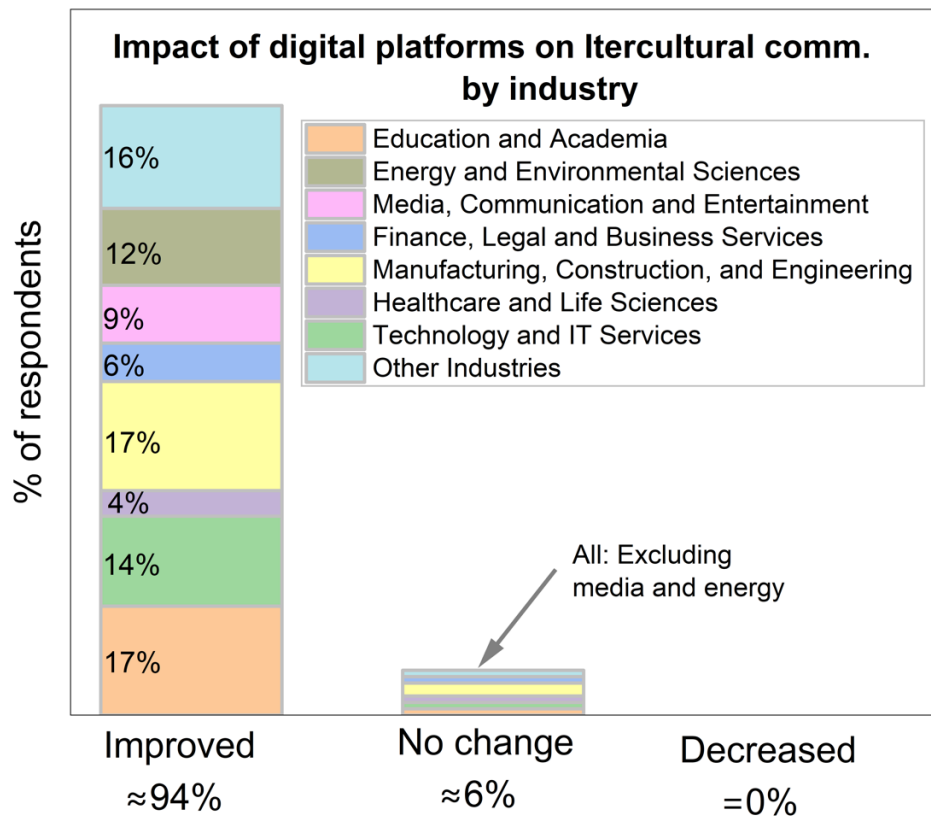


Figure 20. Impact of digital platforms on intercultural communication by industry

Section 5: Personal experience and perceptions

The pie chart (Figure 20.) below depicts the self-reported contribution of digital platforms toward assisting respondents in navigating professional environmental differences. The most significant proportion (38%) cited substantial positive changes in cultural awareness and sensitivity, pointing to cultural intelligence's critical importance in promoting insights about cultural norms, values, and practices.

16% of respondents also expressed the importance of learning the language and developing the communication skills necessary to overcome cross-cultural barriers. According to Adair and Brett (2005), proficiency in various languages is essential for cross-cultural communication because it empowers people to work collaboratively across cultures. Such figures underline that communication skills are an indispensable dimension to develop in cross-cultural contact, as language links different professional cultures (Adair & Brett, 2005). 18% of respondents reported improved collaboration ability and team dynamics, suggesting digital platforms have strengthened their collaborative capacity while working with cross-functional teams. According to Erez et al. (2013), team dynamics in a multicultural environment play a vital role, easily handled through digital tools that promote cross-cultural interaction, enhance team cohesiveness, and improve organizational performance. However, this implies that digital platforms are an integral part of the team processes in global settings and are necessary for efficient collaboration. Ultimately, the "Others" category finally accounted for 9% of the segment.

Specifically, 13% of respondents had yet to respond, and another 6% claimed the platforms did not affect their capacity to manage the cultural gaps. The results suggest that shared experiences on digital platforms are primarily positive but may only partially satisfy user needs. Also, variability in adaptability to the platforms may account for some

respondents' need to show growth in effectively navigating cultural differences. Examining the data without the "No Answer," which brings the absolute impact percentages to about 44%, emphasizes the tremendous importance of digital platforms as a catalyst for CQ (Jiang et al., 2018). With a variety of potential users and application areas, it becomes necessary to consider how different industries and user types of interfaces with these platforms to harness their power to improve intercultural communication. For more information about the figure below, see Figure 30., Figure 31., Figure 32., Figure 33., Figure 34., under the appendix 3.

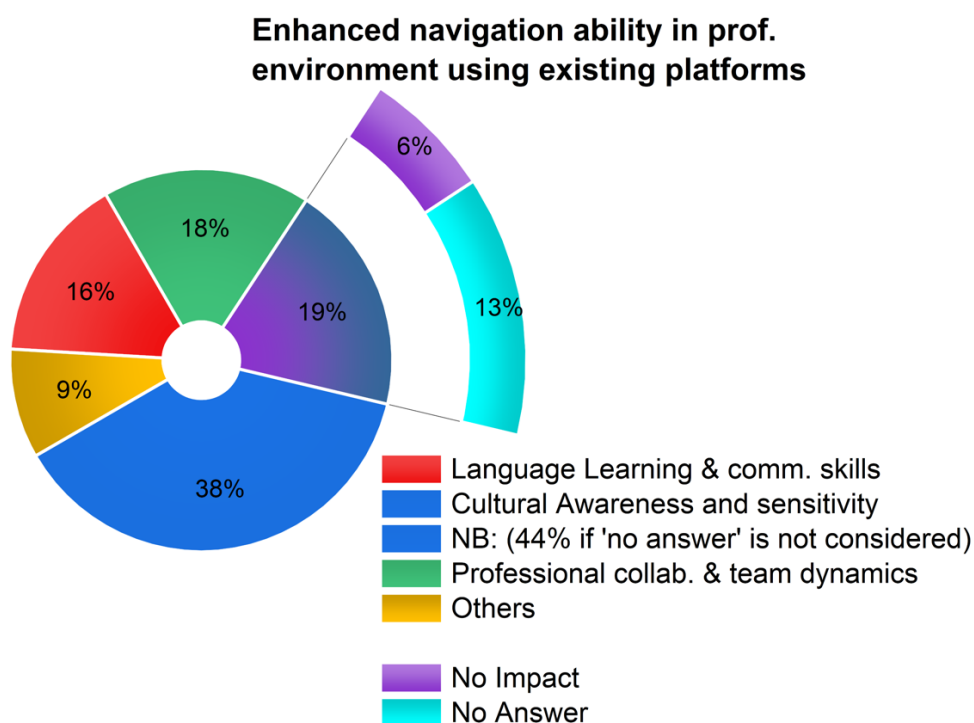


Figure 21. Enhanced navigation ability in a prof. environment using existing platforms

Section 6: Feedback on Digital platforms

The data in Figure 22., "Features that are most beneficial in the used platforms," reveal that 52% of respondents consider interactive learning tools and modules the most valuable feature. Ang and Van Dyne (2015) emphasize that these tools enhance cultural intelligence by allowing users to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. According to

Crowne (2008), they provide a safe place where students can interact with each other in the international arena through experiential learning. 19% of those surveyed found language translation and learning features priceless, as they closed communication gaps (especially with multilingual groups) and improved more precise communication. Some 14% of respondents referenced the need for cultural insights and case studies to offer context to concepts such culture. Erez et al. (2013) stress that case studies help users understand how theoretical ideas apply in real-world scenarios, fostering metacognitive CQ by encouraging reflection and adaptation to specific cultural settings. While only 6% identified user interfaces and experience as strengths, according to Costers et al. (2019), these interfaces are critical in boosting short—and long-term user engagement with digital platforms through increased satisfaction. Ang and Van Dyne (2015) further add that usability directly influences cross-cultural training module effects, suggesting that the efficacy of these platforms significantly hinges upon design. Notably, the 5% of respondents who selected "other" features convey niche needs that are not currently well-met by existing tools (and thus represent niche opportunities for developers). For more information about the Figure 31. (Suggested improvements for existing platforms), see in the listing under appendix 3.

Features that are most beneficial in the used platforms

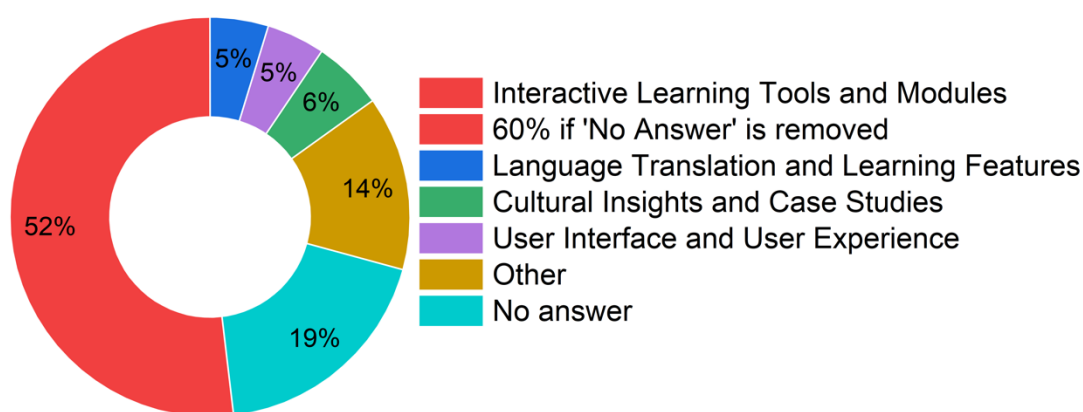


Figure 22. Digital platforms: most beneficial features

Quantitative findings discussion

The analysis demonstrates that our European respondents reflect a diversity of ages and geography, emphasizing the importance of regional context when interpreting results. Crowne (2023) and Adair & Brett (2005) have underscored the significance of CQ in conducting a virtual evaluation of sufficiency using diverse samples. Including a broad and diverse demographic sample offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of these factors. However, avoiding regional characteristics to replicate results outside the region reflects the international business setting (Hofstede et al., 2010). These platforms' most valued aspects were the interactive learning tools and language translation features. Ang and Van Dyne (2015) reinforce that interactivity is critical to developing cultural adaptability. Drawing on the nature of immersive learning environments, Crowne (2008) describes various ways users can practice skills—such as cross-cultural skills—through digital means and in controlled environments. That said, respondents desired to see more regional and industry-specific data. Erez et al. (2013) contend that tailoring platforms to diverse cultures and work environments can significantly enhance their effectiveness. Customized content may improve experience and relevance, particularly within industries with unique cultural challenges.

Moreover, improving usability and functionality is essential to the platform's efficiency. Practical cross-cultural learning tools should integrate Earley and Ang's (2003) observation, which emphasizes the tool's role as an equal conduit for content. Still, it should also provide intuitive interaction, encouraging users to continue using it. Although these platforms work well already, as evidenced by their high recommendation rates, further enhancements in customization and usability will help them better meet diverse user needs. Costers et al. (2019) support this approach, stating that platforms tailored to specific cultural and professional contexts are more adaptable and impactful across various sectors.

4.2 Qualitative analysis

Semi-structured interview thematic analysis: The analysis of all the transcripts from the semi-structured interview revealed the following themes displayed in the Figure 23. (thematic map: cultural intelligence) below. Digital Platform Use (theme 1); Cultural Awareness Development (theme 2); Challenges in Platform Use (theme 3); Intercultural Communication (theme 4); Organizational Strategy for Cultural Intelligence (theme 5).

Emerged Themes

After the analysis of all the transcripts, the following themes were merged:

- Theme 1: Digital Platform Use
- Theme 2: Cultural Awareness Development
- Theme 3: Challenges in Platform Use
- Theme 4: Intercultural Communication
- Theme 5: Organizational Strategy for Cultural Intelligence

Thematic Map

The following thematic map (Figure 23.) presents themes, and sub-themes which are extracted after an in-depth analysis of each transcript:

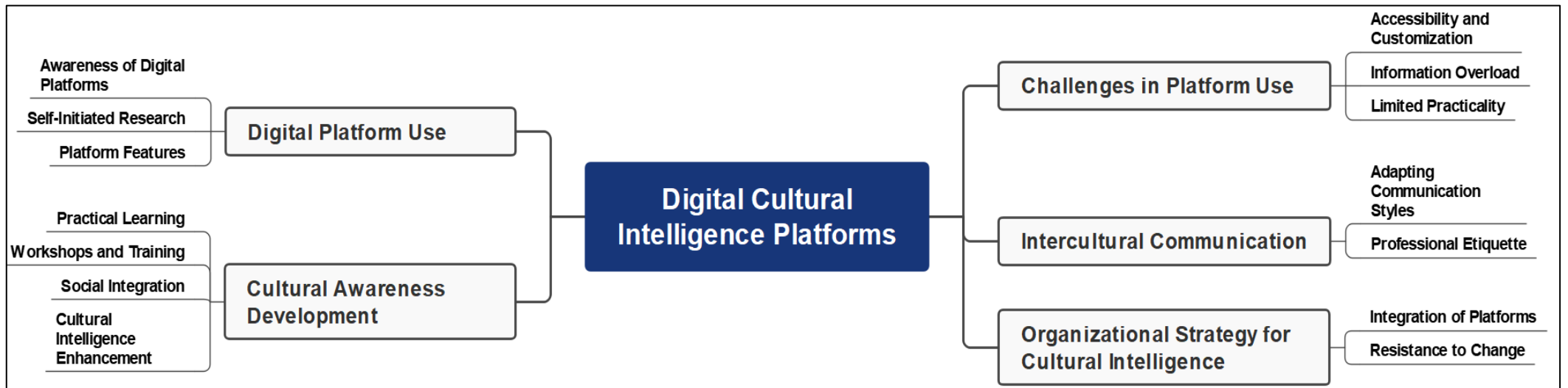


Figure 23. Thematic map - cultural Intelligence

Theme 1: Digital platform usage

Transcription and analysis of the transcripts revealed the following themes: Participants recognized the potential for digital platforms to enhance cultural reinstatement. However, many informants encountered challenges when attempting to use these platforms. A formal introduction or organizational skills are essential to utilize these platforms. Respondents also discussed using some digital tools, specifically only using them sometimes and relying on independent research channels.

Awareness of digital platforms was a significant factor influencing their use. As one participant stated, *"There is such a platform, but I have not used it, as it has not been introduced to the staff"* (Transcript 1), indicating that numerous professionals lack knowledge about the available platforms. These platforms only turn their potential advantages into apparent benefits once organizations formalize them with promotions or training. Participants noted that digital platforms are often event-driven and industry transaction-specific (e.g., matchmaking vs. networking). A participant mentioned, *"We use Enterprise Europe Network for matchmaking around events."* (Transcript 6). The value of these platforms often lies in their application to specific business scenarios rather than continuous cultural intelligence initiatives. These participants agreed that the platforms are a tool for addressing and reducing biases in international business interactions. *"We spend time discussing how cultural biases can affect business relationships," as a participant described. "These platforms help students realize their own biases and adjust accordingly."* (Transcript 7)

In compensation, most of the participants turned to self-initiated research. As one participant observed, *"I go on the net with Google to visit different sites and do a little bit of research about your country."* Transcript 1) This is a quote that reminds us how professionals often attempt to seek out relevant cultural information in the absence or unavailability of institutional tools. However, it reflects deficiencies in structured organizational support and pushes employees toward more generic inputs, such as

Google. Another participant echoed that sentiment: *"I rely on Google... explore a variety of websites for the data I use."* (Transcript 2).

Other interviewees frequently conduct independent research to ensure they are culturally aware of cultural norms and practices before interacting in a foreign country. One participant mentioned, *"Before I travel to any country, I usually do my research and ensure I am conversant with the dos and don'ts."* (Transcript 4) Beyond that, a few participants expressed that they found minimal use for formal platforms, preferring to rely on personal networks and experience. For example, one participant explained, *"I may not need to use the digital cultural intelligence platforms and Google; I do not find the need to do so"* (Transcript 5). This response suggests that professionals with extensive experience in international markets may rely less on formal digital tools and more on their cultural knowledge.

Overwhelmingly most participants expressed the wish to have access to platforms that present targeted cultural information by specific country/region. As one participant articulated, *"I would like to have a tool... by country specific, a tool that provides what you can and cannot do... (do's and don'ts)"* (Transcript 1). Note that it goes beyond an average Joe expectation of digital platforms... but providing practical, regional content for professionals navigating a culturally diverse environment. In line with this, a different participant seemed to plead for tools that were policy- and country-specific: *"Some.... tool... tailored to countries, including clear do's and don'ts do as its recommendations"* (Transcript 2). This, in turn, underscores the continuing need for cultural intelligence platforms that can interpret national-specific customary behaviors and values as well as ideologies and business practices.

CQ platforms are valuable for business professionals and serve as necessary educational resources. As one participant expressed, *"When discussing biased behavior, I prompt my MBA students to use cultural competency tools; that's a powerful tool to orient yourself when wanting [...] to understand or get familiar with other culture"* (Transcript 7). Hence,

this shows the two-way nature of these platforms, which solely boost cultural competence in a professional space and increase awareness levels in an academic environment, assisting students in properly learning about subtle aspects of cultural expression and stereotypes.

Lack of awareness and formal integration within organizations undermines the effectiveness of digital platforms, despite their rich CQ resources. The lack of proper institutional knowledge led most participants to conduct their own research. The situational nature of these platforms, designed to address specific needs related to a particular event, limits their application. Such platforms should be encouraged among organizations with adaptations to specific cultural settings—integrated into policy to achieve higher levels of cultural understanding. The below Figure 24. represents digital platform usage.

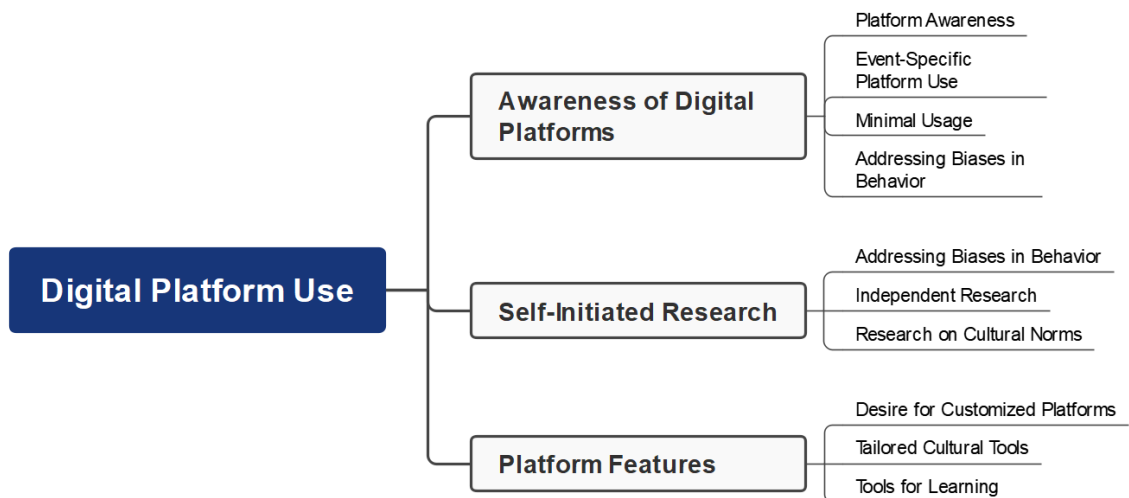


Figure 24. Thematic map - cultural intelligence

Theme 2: Cultural awareness development

There is a threefold pathway of cultural awareness among global business professionals: direct experience, formal scholastic training, and dedication to inculcation in the host culture. Interviews reveal that the majority are trained in cultural sensitivity, which is a key requirement for successful global interaction via formal classroom and practical

experience. The participants through their responses, also highlighted that this development appeared multifaceted, with knowledge gained from experiencing cultural issues directly, through formal workshops, and from mentoring experiences. Formal and informal learning enables cultural sensitivity and develops the ability to adjust in international business settings.

Many of those who participated mentioned the possibility of learning by doing. Another participant offered this, *"In Japan, a 'yes' is not always the end of the contract. I had to learn this through experience"* (Transcript 1). Besides it also shows that professionals often learn how to communicate and conduct business in their respective fields by trial and error. Indeed, a further participant expressed that *"It has been such a trial and error each time I travelled to a new country"* (Transcript 3) well advocating the concept that experiential learning can be the most potent educator. There is experience, and then there are formal training programs; both have their role. For example, many of the participants indicated that workshops conducted by local experts helped to develop their awareness of culture. As one participant mentioned: *"We prepare these SMEs through various workshops, using native speakers who understand the dos and don'ts in those markets"* (Transcript 6). These organized programs offer cultural knowledge that professionals need to work efficiently in different markets and provide insights which may take years of experience to learn. The same participant said, *"We aim to connect SMEs with individuals who have both research and business expertise, especially when entering new international markets"* (Transcript 6). This narrative reveals that successfully entering new markets requires connecting with local experts with cultural and business knowledge.

In addition, participants identified social integration as an essential element. One participant said, *"encouraging students to avoid their community and immerse themselves in the local culture helps them better understand how things work here"* (Transcript 8). On the other hand, this emphasizes that you must fully settle down professionally and socially within your community to understand local cultural norms

and values. There is no better way to learn about an area than by living and working with locals, which you can do online or in a classroom.

Finally, a common theme among those entering new cultural environments was the need for expatriate preparedness. One participant stated, *"We spend time preparing expatriates for the cultural challenges they will face. Without this preparation, they often struggle"* (Transcript 10). This implies that expatriates are challenged to take specialist education to know how cultural differences can hinder them. Otherwise, they would face terrible obstacles in adjusting and adapting to foreign environments. Developing international business talent through improving the CQ of professionals relies heavily on digital platforms. One participant said, *"having access to this data platform... I can gain valuable knowledge to prepare myself for overseas business purposes"* (Transcript 1). This shows how platforms give users better views of foreign cultures to prepare them when bidding for international markets.

Culturally intelligent platforms are also critical in helping professionals already in the workforce gain global business skills that benefit everyone at their company. Another individual stated, *"Students need to learn how to interact with diverse cultures, and these tools give them an idea of what to expect when they start working internationally"* (Transcript 7). They expose students to different cultural practices, promote intercultural competence, and give them a competitive edge in their professional careers. Businesses around the world deal with other people, and to be successful, they need to integrate and understand local customs. As one of our participants said, *"Companies that don't understand local customs will struggle to build successful relationships... Platforms can help avoid these costly mistakes"* (Transcript 9). Hence, this is a good example of why cultural intelligence platforms are necessary for businesses to avoid making cultural mistakes that can stop negotiations or ruin partnerships.

Thus, most interviewees reported that formal training and exposure were necessary to build cultural competency. Although trial and error are a shared experience, workshops

and immersion in social activities also sensitize students to cultural differences. Expat preparation was also a critical success factor often mentioned by professionals, who stressed that it equipped them to face the cultural challenges of working abroad. Figure 25. represent the cultural awareness development.



Figure 25. Mind map – Cultural awareness development

Thematic 3: Challenges in platform use

Each participant highlighted substantial challenges they experienced while using digital cultural intelligence platforms, reducing their likely benefits. Some of these challenges are information gaps, unavailability, accessibility and information overload, which make the platforms less effective. The responses suggested that digital platforms could reach their full potential, and some of these barriers were removed. Time and again, participants cited concerns with existing digital platforms, particularly regarding the depth and relevance of cultural content. A common theme was that the existing platforms often need more specificity and actionability to inform good decisions in messy cultural contexts. One informant stated: *"The information available on different websites is often too general"* (Transcript 1). Because culture is often talked about in vague or general terms, cultural knowledge is not very applicable to real-world business scenarios, and more importantly, skills still need to be gained. Moreover, the need for internet access in many areas intensifies these problems by making it impossible for users to take full advantage of those digital resources.

In addition to information gaps, some participants pointed out the difficulty of assessing culturally nuanced information. One participant explained, *"It is not always simple to access the correct information... Sometimes, we need to improve the documentation of a region's cultural nuances"* (Transcript 9). People conducting business in certain regions need clear guidelines on adequate preparation for cultural interactions, as some regions do not report local customs and practices online or, worse, conduct them under the radar. This critical issue affects global professional effectiveness. This adds another layer of challenge in terms of being able to access digital platforms that are often regionalized, and by extension making it nearly impossible for those more protectionist or less internet proficient countries. As one participant said, *"oftentimes The Great Wall of China blocks some of website; it is impossible get the information"* (Transcript 2). However, when that data is not available — or relevant to the given situation, obtaining the necessary CQ becomes problematic and sometimes impossible, thus making it

difficult for professionals to receive critical data needed for effective cross-cultural interplays.

While some users called for more specificity, others said that platforms could bombard people with excessive information. Another participant mentioned that *"there is a circulation of information and confusion... It is not easy to get accurate info these days"* (Transcript 5). And even on platforms, their abundance of data overwhelmed users in content requiring help to discover meaningful cultural insights. Another connected challenge is the number of tools and platforms professionals' use. As one informant expressed, *"We have all those tools; we seem to love building yet another (tool)... it is that the management of all the tools and making sure they are all up to date can be cumbersome"* (Transcript 7). This shows the difficulty of managing multiple platforms, which can dilute each platform's value if you overload your user with fewer options.

Participants identified a considerable challenge: the gap between these platforms' theoretical knowledge and practical, real-world applications. One participant said, *"Sometimes what you learn from these platforms doesn't translate well into real-life situations... You must experience the culture firsthand to understand it truly"* (Transcript 9). Hence, although digital platforms provide some sort of assistance in reading culture, real understanding can only be experienced. In the same vein, one other participant said *"There's often a disconnect between what we study in research and what happens in the field... These platforms are good, but they cannot replicate real-world experience"* (Transcript 10). This implies that there is a disconnect between academic research and practical business, and while platforms serve an important role in theoretical frameworks, they need to provide professionals with the requisite skills for cultural interactions to be fruitful. This underscores the issue of access, personalization and implementation associated with digital cultural intelligence platforms. These tools offer theoretical insights that can be useful but often fall short of providing concrete, actionable information because of knowledge gaps and overload. But also, the burden of having to juggle numerous platforms sounds exhausting and it loses its value; there

will be no crossover effect in real-life social interactions. To boost cultural awareness and competency, however, these platforms should be much more granular, and easily accessible while still being context-relevant and tying into a real-life business need but with also the recognition that first-hand experience is paramount for developing intercultural competence. Figure 26. demonstrate the challenges in platform usage.

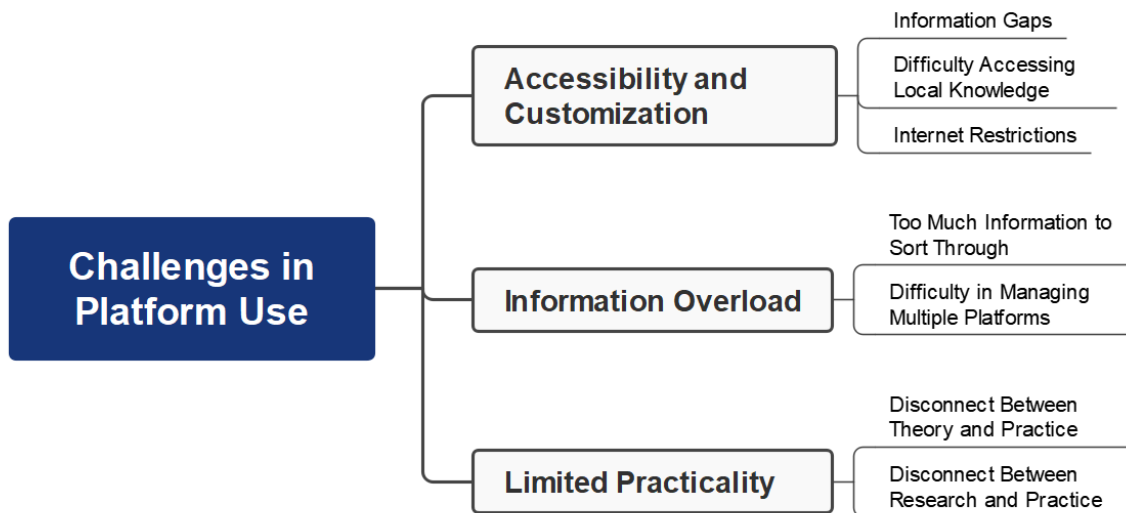


Figure 26. Mind map - Challenges in platform use

Theme 4: Intercultural communication

The participants' responses highlighted the critical role of intercultural communication in international business, stating that success in this field requires adapting to local norms, understanding diverse negotiation styles, and respecting cultural hierarchies. Most participants mentioned that flexibility in communication and sensitivity to cultural differences are crucial to building solid relationships and facilitating smooth business operations. How they navigated these challenges further reinforced the importance of cultural differences, specifically related to negotiating and hierarchies. In terms of research methods, intercultural communication is more than just languages for various professionals—it calls for adapting to the specific values and expectations of other cultures.

A key aspect of effective intercultural communication is adapting styles. Someone even explained why Africans tend to be labelled latecomers: *"In Africa, arriving 30 minutes or an hour late is acceptable. One must remain calm and patient..."* So, this emphasizes the need for flexibility to understand how different cultures see time and punctuality and how these variations will affect communication. There was also mention of negotiation style understanding among participants. Now one of the participants explained it in this way: *"A handshake was a contract, end of story, but this Finnish project manager wanted it all written down"* (Transcript 2). In contrast, this illustrates the formalities—or rather, the lack thereof—that characterize negotiations worldwide. While some cultures view a verbal or symbolic agreement as sufficient, other cultures require written documentation, and that is an important component for professionals to consider in negotiating success.

The participants agreed that part of intercultural communication is understanding the interplay between cultural hierarchies. Organizational flatness or hierarchy structure varies from culture to culture. *"Some cultures have a hierarchy, while in Europe, they tend to have flat organizational structures."* (Transcript 5) This means that we must be able to recognize in various cultures the levels of formality and respect for authority and adapt accordingly. So, understanding these cultural hierarchies is key to preventing miscommunication and creating friction in relationships. Besides hierarchies, participants also described professional etiquette through local customs in constructing rapport. One informant expressed, *"I've learned that it is essential to embrace local traditions; it builds trust and rapport"* (Transcript 9). Relating to local customs is a sure way of paying respects to the same, which subsequently creates trust and rapport between people across the business landscape globally. Figure 27. presents the intercultural communication.



Figure 27. Mind map – Intercultural communication

Theme 5: Organizational strategy for intelligence

The successful adaptation of CQ platforms into organizational practices would add much value to international business. Even though these are potential gold mines, most interviewees stated that a lot of organizations need to start using them sooner. The replies suggested that these tools help improve communication, negotiation, and relationship-building in the global market. Organizational CQ platforms are viewed by researchers as strategic assets. However, it is often not easy for many organizations to realize the benefits of such platforms, and so consumer resistance persists at this point. Companies ought to encourage the usage of these tools internally among their functions to improve international operations and make them raw materials of the global business strategy.

The strategic character of platforms mentioning digital was referenced frequently by participants. One participant pointed out, *"We're using these platforms as strategic tools to help us grow our businesses in new markets"* (Transcript 9). This is an example of how organizations have utilized digital cultural intelligence platforms as key elements in the management process to either understand new markets or create successful business relationships. However, it has become a recurring pattern, and organizational resistance to change keeps coming back. One additional participant said, *"Many organizations are resistant to change...They see CQ as a 'nice to have,' not a 'need to have,' which holds them back"* (Transcript 9). As a result, this represents a common obstacle for companies when adopting cultural intelligence platforms, instead of seeing them as unnecessary. This type of resistance constrains the wider use of such platforms and makes

organizations unable to seize their full benefits. Most participants had to promote the use of the platform domestically. Other examples include: *"We could benefit from promoting the existing digital cultural intelligence platform internally... We should launch a CQ-focused internal marketing campaign."* (Transcript 5). This highlights the importance of providing a healthy presence of these platforms, and hence organizations need to reinforce their use and ensure that employees are aware of these platforms and know how to leverage them effectively.

Numerous interviewees said that CQ platforms are very strategic for organizations dealing with international markets. Nevertheless, resistance to change and less promotion from within restrict their earlier adoption. Those with these platforms earn a competitive edge in global business, emphasizing cross-communication here, negotiation there, and, ultimately, relationship-building across cultures. For organizational strategy for cultural intelligence, see in Figure 28.

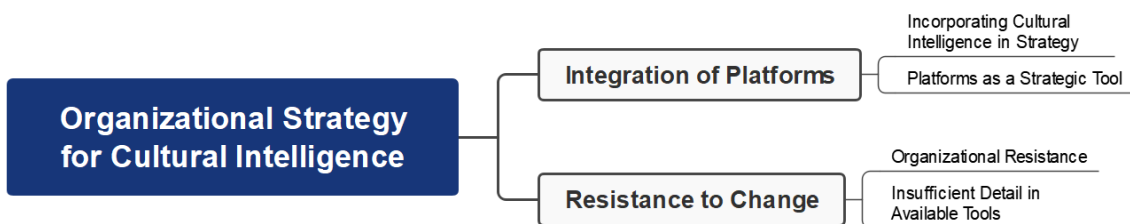


Figure 28. Mind map – Organizational strategy for cultural intelligence

4.3 Findings' summary

Although the quantitative findings are mixed, they suggest a potential for using digital platforms to develop CQ. Even though 82% of survey respondents used these platforms, a decline has been noted due to problems such as low formal support and limited training opportunities concerning this technology within organizations. No more than a third of technical and engineering professionals (31%) claim to use the platforms regularly, with even lower numbers in managerial (23%) and creative roles (18%). This

seems to suggest a disconnect between recognition of digital platforms as enablers for CQ and their real-world implementation. Additionally, 44% of participants said they want continent-specific content highlighting the cultural relevance these platforms must necessitate. Together, these results suggest the need for much more focused action to drive the adoption and usage of cultural intelligence digital solutions at an exceptional scale.

Cultural awareness development heavily relies on experiential learning. Professionals often emphasize learning through trial and error, as quantitative data shows that 41% of respondents rated digital platforms as effective for cognitive learning. In comparison, 34% rated them as moderately effective. These findings demonstrate the importance of hands-on experiences with digital platforms as supplementary tools. For example, 43% of respondents reported improved motivational CQ, indicating a growing desire to engage with diverse cultures. For example, 43% of respondents reported improved motivational CQ, indicating an increasing willingness to engage with diverse cultures. Yet both qualitative and quantitative results variably reflected a significant disconnect between digital learning with its applied, real-world applications. Platform usage patterns are situational as opposed to continuous. According to the survey, 50% of usage of digital platforms goes to communication, 35% to collaboration, and 30% to project management. While these tools may help with professional communications, they need to do so while contributing to an ongoing process of culturally intelligent professionalism. This is also further justified: despite such any level of integration in an organization, the reality is that 20% of professionals simply direct themselves outwards to do research (e.g., Google Scholar etc.). This means that companies must market the digital platforms and create initiatives to encourage the usage of these mediums regularly.

Another important theme was the place of digital platforms in professional education, with 37% using them for academic and professional development. Thus, this emphasized a dual role of platforms in corporate and educational space, which reflected the importance of using platforms for imparting CQ to future leaders. Although 17% of the

respondents offered quite effective, there are other inferences that this efficacy only applies on a theoretical level, however, basic proficiency is lacking. Such findings highlight the need for improvement, especially in integrating interactive and practical learning elements. The quantitative results confirm that even though these digital tools have the potential to increase cultural awareness and intercultural communication, there are also some barriers. Breaking down these barriers is essential, whereby limited organizational support, the need for region-specific content, and the struggles to find a bridge from theory to practice are three key challenges. Targeting these challenges with relevant content, encouraging experiential forms of engagement, and increasing the interactivity of platforms may preach further cultural intelligence growth.

Thematic analysis repeatedly indicates, in context-appropriate networking and situationally used digital platforms, that the nature of these professional communities is not an ongoing learning tool for professionals. This is also reflected in quantitative findings, with 50% of platform usage devoted to communication, 35% to team collaboration, and project management taking only 30% of the focus on platforms. This pattern of usage highlights the need to embed these digital platforms into everyday processes to facilitate sustainable engagement with a new culture developed over time. Though the platforms show promise, 44% of respondents said they wanted more content focused on region-specific behavior, suggesting existing use cases have yet to fully deliver cultural insights.

Furthermore, 20% of respondents continue to turn to external tools (e.g., Google Scholar) to supplement their research due to poor organizational fit with these platforms. This emphasizes the need for marketing the digital platforms ahead of time in organizations to promote their higher continuity. Qualifiable experience and formal training will continue to be vital ingredients for cultural knowledge. This is evident in survey data, as 41% of the respondents rated digital platforms as effective for improving cognitive CQ, whereas 34% rated them moderately effective. Digital platforms provide the tool for cognitive learning, but it is only through real-life cultural encounters (experiential

learning) that an individual gains a genuine appreciation and understanding of local culture since they will experience first-hand how lifestyles differ (Tremblay, 2020), which reinforces the need of digital tools in combination with real-life experiences.

Challenges in platform usage were the most critical theme, with participants noting concerns around information gaps, accessibility issues, and inundation of information each time. While 44% of respondents said they needed more regional content, only 30% used project management and collaboration platforms—showing the challenge of separating useful cultural insights from existing data. It noted that platforms usually must bring a much more theoretical understanding into practice interactions across cultures while participants also saw. These disconnects between what is theoretically possible and what happens in practice reveal that the platforms often lack interactivity and are driven by context-specific features, limiting their applicability to the real world.

Other main findings were about adapting to communication styles and cultural hierarchies. Also, quantitative analysis shows a base description of the survey, for example, 50% of respondents' main communication is using digital platforms. Intercultural communication is, however, not just about the use of platforms but also means integrating into local habits and negotiating styles. Two-thirds of participants highlighted the role that cultural hierarchies play, with 22% of respondents saying their knowledge of these had increased using the platform. However, this shows that although the platform is designed to help with communication, bringing cultural learning into real interactions depends on whether users know how to translate their interaction through culture in person. Finally, the results show that a major impediment to the effective use of digital platforms is organizational resistance to their adoption. While these platforms were rated very effective in enhancing CQ by 34% of respondents, many organizations need to treat cultural intelligence not simply as a gimmick but as a strategic asset. However, many participants said that there is limited internal push for these tools, and they end up not being part of the long-term business strategy. If corporations were able to overcome the resistance typically displayed at the organizational level to blend in CQ

within global business strategies, then these platforms would ultimately channel their value more effectively to enhance international success.

4.4 Extended theoretical framework

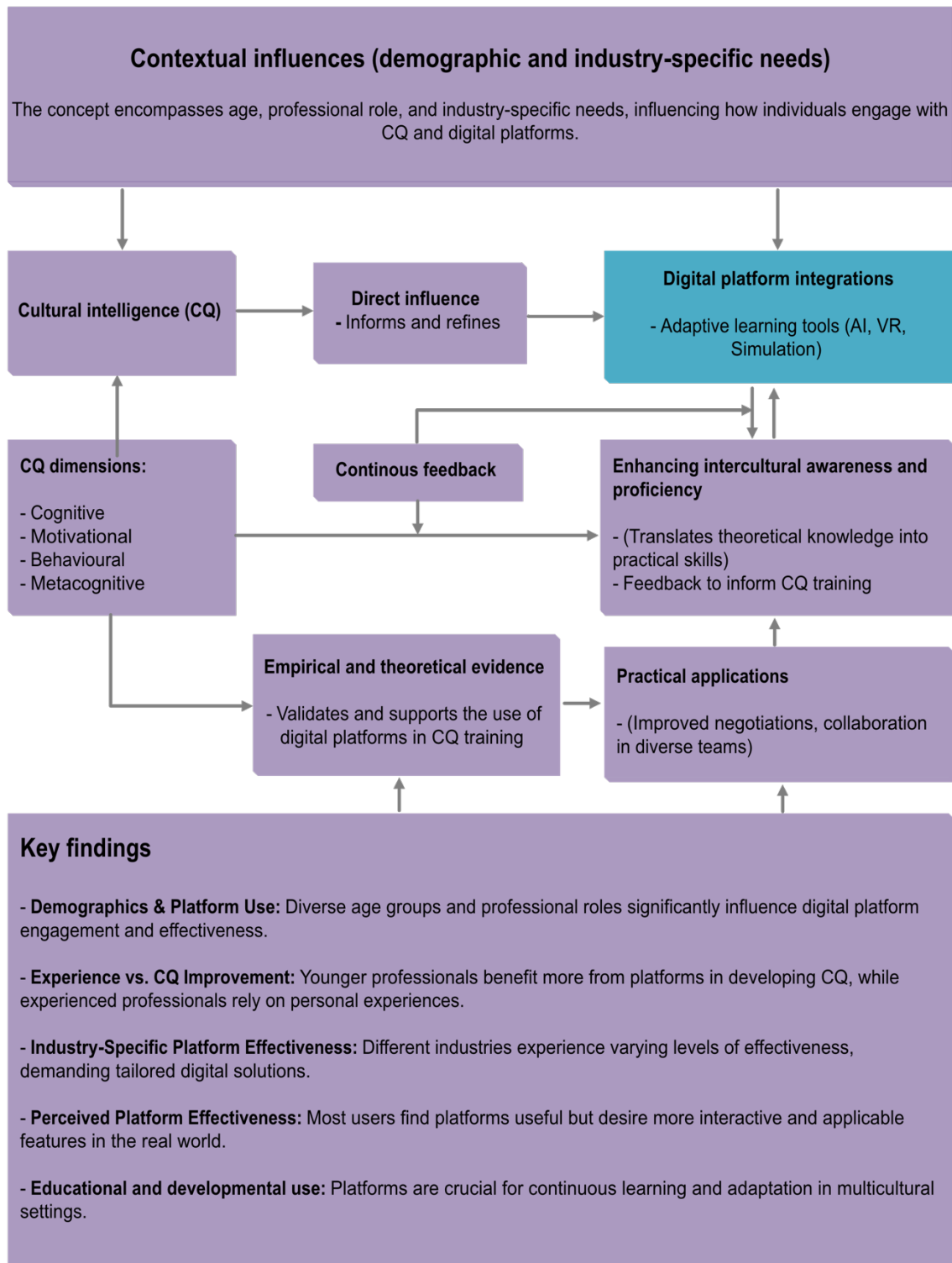


Figure 29. Enhance theoretical framework with key findings

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical contribution

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is the foundational concept in understanding and navigating intercultural dynamics in global business settings. This critical study elaborates on how digital platforms might facilitate CQ improvement based on the currently prominent Four-Factor Model (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008) and the Cultural Intelligence Scale (Van Dyne et al., 2008). However, this section reveals the theoretical implications of findings by showing how they align and diverge from relevant literature and contribute to refining and extending existing CQ theories.

The results confirm that digital platforms are an existing tool for CQ development, especially in global businesses. Succeeding Adams and Webb (2016), two critical aspects—interactivity and immediacy of feedback—are crucial, contributing significantly to users' malleability and cross-cultural flexibility. Consequently, this is an essential progression in the research; however, experiential learning features such as simulations are far more impactful when this theory can be equated to actionable skills. These findings add to the significant work of Livermore (2011) on using CQ by providing evidence that digital platforms can facilitate meaningful and practical intercultural competence in handling local/remote and cross-border interactions.

Moreover, the research points out that high-quality and culturally relevant content can make a significant contribution to improving cognitive CQ. Participants indicated that curated materials for sectors and regions greatly help understanding cultural norms and values. This also builds on the cognitive dimension as foundational to CQ (Ang and Van Dyne 2008) but tackles Crowne's (2008) critique that digital platforms do not capture essential cultural depth. This is in line with Ott and Michailova's (2018) call for sector-specific adaptations that underline the importance of tailoring CQ training to the setting

to which it applies, as such adjustment enhances the viability and effectiveness of CQ training.

Adaptability became a strength and a weakness of CQ digital platforms. These tools can provide non-specific cultural training by generalizing, but they often need more flexibility to meet unique industry and regional cultural demands. Thus, this assists in critiques, such as those by Blasco, Feldt, and Jakobsen (2012), that CQ does not generalize across different work environments. Formerly, it ensured the results offered an intelligent, tailored launch and greater agility to address industry demands requiring specific cultural knowledge. Finally, the study shows that experiential learning elements are strongly needed in promoting metacognitive and behavioral CQ.

Finally, the research to conclude demonstrates a sizeable lack of integration of experiential learning elements at developing metacognitive and behavioral CQ. Even though cognitive CQ was the most developed dimension among respondents, current platforms failed to capitalize on reflective practices and adaptive behaviors needed for real-world intercultural engagements. This remark is consistent with that of Van Dyne et al.'s (2008) assertion that behavioral CQ is key for effective intercultural interaction and supports Erez et al.'s (2013) call to integrate reflective exercises into CQ training.

The findings provide implications and several contributions to CQ theory. They show the opportunities for CQ training extensibility using digital platforms and identify gaps that could be further explored for improvement, such as incorporating the experiential learning processes and customization of the given information for specific industries. Also, the existing frameworks could be refined based on the introduction of a new type of cognitive CQ, which serves as a base for further development. Lastly, the study challenges the broad applicability of CQ tools by highlighting the necessity of further research into personalized and context-based modifications. Such insights facilitate the operationalization of CQ theories and can, therefore, inform the design of more effective digital training platforms.

5.2 Managerial implications

CQ also stands for cultural intelligence, the hallmark of triumph in the hand-wringing global business landscape. Managers must develop and foster CQ in their teams as the workplace becomes more culturally diverse. These findings outline various methods to enhance CQ, and the outcomes directly influence managerial decisions.

The primary area requires organizations to invest in digital platforms with accessible experiential learning tools. These platforms create simulated experiences of proper workplace scenarios dealing with cross-cultural real-life interactions and behaviors, where employees can practice intercultural communication and negotiation skills and translate the same into strategic decision-making. Second, managers must tailor training content to industry and regional needs. Customized cultural advice enables teams to overcome issues and respond better to local culture. For instance, regionalized training programs can equip employees to interact with clients in certain countries by protecting against cultural mistakes while improving relationships. Third, managerial strategy should focus on adaptability. Although generalized CQ training programs are helpful, managers must pay attention to the nuances of how cultures operate in their respective industries. Apart from flexible training modes, allow team members to share real-life examples of how cross-cultural engagement has impacted their personal or professional lives, as this can help enrich the learning process while creating a holistic work environment.

Moreover, building a culture that emphasizes CQ is critical if we want intercultural effectiveness to last. Managers should lead in this respect. By being culturally sensitive and approachable, managers demonstrate their appreciation for diversity—without any contradictions between lip service and behavior. Making CQ goals part of the staff performance appraisal process and rewarding culturally adaptive working attitudes will help embed CQ development into the company's core values.

Furthermore, a primary constraint is the challenge of accurately measuring CQ via digital platforms. CQ is context-sensitive and best captured in situations that complicate the assessment process (Ang & Inkpen, 2008). Thus, future research needs to establish reliable and context-sensitive CQ operationalization methods that adequately reflect the complex nature of intercultural exchange. Jones et al. (2020) acknowledge the importance of this—especially in team contexts—and indicate that digital platforms need to integrate assessments during task performance to monitor and enhance CQ development over time.

A vital criticism relates to the generalizability of CQ research in other industries and contexts. Blasco, Feldt, and Jakobsen (2012) note that the various studies surrounding CQ are so diverse that their contextuality may differ based on culture or profession. As a result, CQ training today may be ineffective as it fails to align with the current cultural context (Chen et al., 2012). Finally, although digital platforms increasingly integrate with CQ training programs, more research is needed to determine how these tools could be adapted to fit cultural requirements specific to different industries (Ott & Michailova, 2018). Further research could extend the concept of tailoring CQ platforms with content specific to a particular sector, which would serve the diverse needs of professionals who work in fields that place high pressure on their cultural adaptability. CQ platforms provide another opportunity for future research on experiential learning. MacNab (2012) believes that experiential learning is vital for meaningful CQ development, and so far, digital platforms still need components such as immersive simulations or interactive elements. Future research should investigate how to make CQ platforms experiential by incorporating components (real-time applications or interactive simulations) that promote hands-on learning and offer practical experience, especially for expatriates and individuals who work in high-diversity sectors (Vlajčić et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Spreitzer et al. (2005) highlight a need for digital platforms for CQ practice, especially in technology-focused workplace settings. Digital CQ models are only suited for digital contexts with scarce face-to-face interactions. Thus, it is imperative to examine

their future applicability, given the growing presence of virtual and remote work. Future research should investigate the effectiveness of CQ training in these contexts to keep the tools relevant amid growing remote and digitally mediated work environments. Again, scaling issues limit CQ's development through digital platforms. Digital platforms enable CQ solutions that are effective and scalable but may also need contextual benefits (Presbitero, 2016). Therefore, it also points out a need to examine digital features that may need differentiation in the relevance of CQ training when the research and application goal is for more generic use in various professions and cultural settings (e.g., region-specific content, industry-specific, etc.). Additionally, international assignment agencies on digital platforms appreciate that expatriates have specific needs, and these could be met most effectively with customized content designed to facilitate cultural adaptation and effective knowledge transfer (Vlajčić et al., 2019).

Furthermore, creating a culture that values CQ is essential for sustained intercultural effectiveness. Managers should lead by example, demonstrating cultural sensitivity and openness in their interactions. By incorporating CQ goals into performance evaluations and rewarding culturally adaptive behaviors, managers can embed CQ development into the organization's core values. Closing the gap in developing metacognitive and behavioral CQ needs active efforts. Managers must promote a reflective method, like post-action reviews, where employees evaluate their cultural interactions to comprehend aspects in need of improvement. Role-play or real-time problem-solving team-building activities are another way to further strengthen behavioral flexibility, preparing employees with the tools they will need to tackle complex intercultural issues.

To conclude, managers are best positioned to create CQ in their teams. Using digital platforms, tailoring training content, embracing flexibility, infusing CQ into the organization culture and bridging practice gaps can help managers boost practicing cultural competencies in their teams. Implementing these strategies not only enhances team cohesion and performance but also prepares organizations for advancement in the increasingly globalized business environment.

5.3 Limitations

The study present raises some limitations to the exploration of cultural intelligence (CQ) and its deployment via digital platforms. One main limitation stem from the reliance on existing digital CQ platforms due to the underdevelopment of the author's startup project. Although this adjustment was necessary, the study was limited in its capacity to evaluate original concepts or tools. Moreover, the specific demographics sampled for the study were based on surveys over 100 respondents and 10 interviewees. —most were in early to mid-career stages and based primarily in Europe—which may limit generalizability (the ability to apply the findings on a global level).

Another major shortcoming is the challenge of measuring CQ within digital environments. Assessing CQ through digital tools for online deployment is complex, given that CQ, by its nature, is context sensitive. Existing platforms for measuring CQ are generic, which limited this research (Ang & Inkpen, 2008; Jones et al., 2020), although previous studies have suggested that effective measurement of CQ needs to be contextualized.

In addition, there were methodological challenges associated with the researcher's experience of mixed methods. This inexperience might also have guided the design and categorization of survey and interview questions, which possibly also impacted the depth of data collection. Although we refined questions iteratively to improve reliability, future research may benefit from more robust mixed-methods frameworks to optimize validity and comprehensiveness.

Lastly, experiential learning elements have yet to be integrated into digital CQ platforms. Most have limited interactive components, like simulations or role-playing, to help with the journey from theory to practice. This shortcoming is consistent with the criticisms raised by MacNab (2012) and Vlačić et al. (2019), reinforcing the call for tools to engage learners in experiential aspects of real-world intercultural interactions.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

Future research should focus on developing and refining digital platforms in contexts specific to the industry and region. According to Ott & Michailova (2018), customization is crucial for improving CQ training relevance across various work contexts. Regionally adapted content has the potential for additional research that may affect user engagement and intercultural competence in healthcare, manufacturing, as well as education.

Longitudinal study designs are also called for to investigate the developmental longevity and sustainability of CQ. Further, exploring how CQ of individuals may evolve across different stages in their careers as well as through other life events could provide a framework for understanding these changes and the longevity of such characteristics on professional work and organizational outcomes (Afsar et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2022).

CQ is also intersecting quite rapidly with digital competencies, and this area promises an avenue for future research. Additionally, this opens the possibility of future studies to investigate the roles that would improve reliance on virtual teams and remote work; future studies should examine how digital skills enhance CQ in virtual environments, particularly in fostering cross-cultural collaboration and communication (Davidaviciene & Al Majzoub, 2022). This is an especially relevant line of inquiry in the post-COVID-19 era as organizations continue to adapt to hybrid work environments. It is also necessary to explore experiential learning elements in the digital CQ platforms. Including simulations, role-playing exercises, and real-time feedback mechanisms would greatly increase their practical applicability (Costers et al., 2019). Future research should investigate how these features affect the motivational and behavioral CQ dimensions of users, addressing gaps recognized in this study.

Finally, conducting more CQ research outside of business contexts could provide a broader understanding of its applicability. Research activities on CQ within non-profit, educational and healthcare organizations may provide important information about its

impact across diverse professional settings (Fakhreldin et al., 2021). For example, research examining the effects of CQ on patient care or teacher-student relationships in multicultural settings may enhance our understanding of its interdisciplinary relevance.

These gaps and avenues for future research will enable a more holistic view of cultural intelligence, enhancing its theoretical and practical significance across cultures.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. AI disclaimer

This master's thesis has been written with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in compliance with the instruction provided by the University of Vaasa.

An overview of the AI tools that were employed:

- QuillBot: To polish writings.
- Grammarly and EasyBib: For checking grammar and spell-checking as well as to write strong sentences with clarity and coherence.
- ChatGPT (free and paid versions): To brainstorm and iterate on ideas, edit, and suggest thesis joints.

This thesis study employed these tools to help enhance the writing process; however, they did not ultimately replace the author's own thinking and analysis nor argumentation. Hence, all AI-generated suggestions were written, rewritten, or combined by the thesis's author to ensure unique, accurate, and personalized content. According to the University of Vaasa's ethical guidelines, the author of this thesis is fully aware that she is responsible for the content of the work submitted and its accuracy and integrity. All errors and omissions are mine.

Appendix 2. Quantitative data survey link

The survey link is accessible, for more information about the survey question, please click on the link below.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScTQ5lOhDhgnt_4sR3V8kUu733NPbWQLyJ84mnBUIM4YRW7DQ/viewform?usp=pp_url.

Appendix 3. Removed quantitative data (graphs) interpretations

The graphs and interpretations below are not included the interpretation

What are the strengths of digital cultural intelligence platforms respondents use?

The pie chart (Figure 30.) below analyses the strengths that users perceive in the digital cultural intelligence platforms they use. The figure below originates from the **Section 5: Personal experience and perceptions**, this question was asked in the survey. Thus, the interpretation is added below based on the length, if needed, please, ask and the interpretation will be provided from the author.

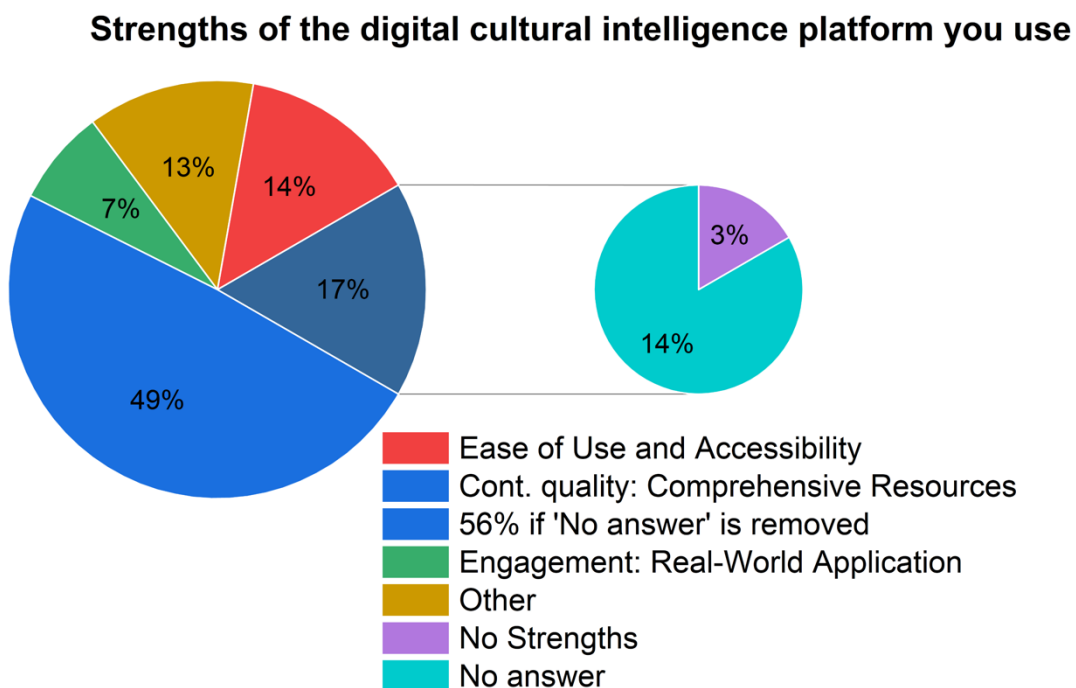


Figure 30. Strength of the digital cultural intelligence platforms respondents use

Suggested improvements for existing platforms: Figure 31. identify the key improvements that respondents believe would enhance the effectiveness of existing digital platforms. The figure below is from **Section 6: Feedback on Digital platforms**.

Suggested improvements for existing platforms

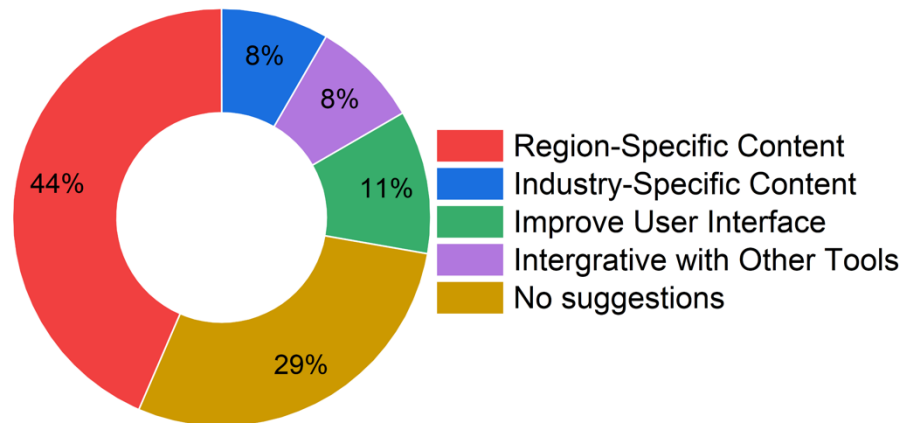


Figure 31. Respondents' suggested improvement from existing platforms

Would you recommend these digital platforms to others in your field? Why or why not?

This survey respondents' recommendation for the platform using Figure 32., and Figure 33. respondents were asked whether they would recommend the digital platforms that they are currently using in their industry. Based on the responses of the survey, Figure 32. from **Section 6: Feedback on Digital platforms**, shows the percentage of responders that stated they would recommend the platform.

Would you recommend these digital platforms to others in your industry?

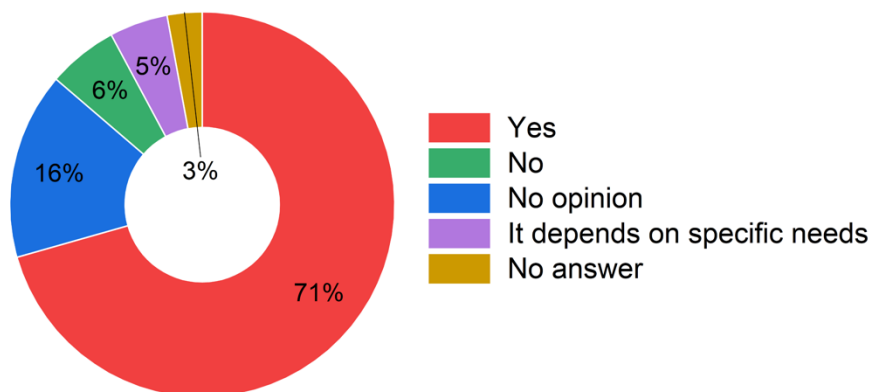


Figure 32. Platform recommendations from respondents

Which digital platforms to others in your industry?

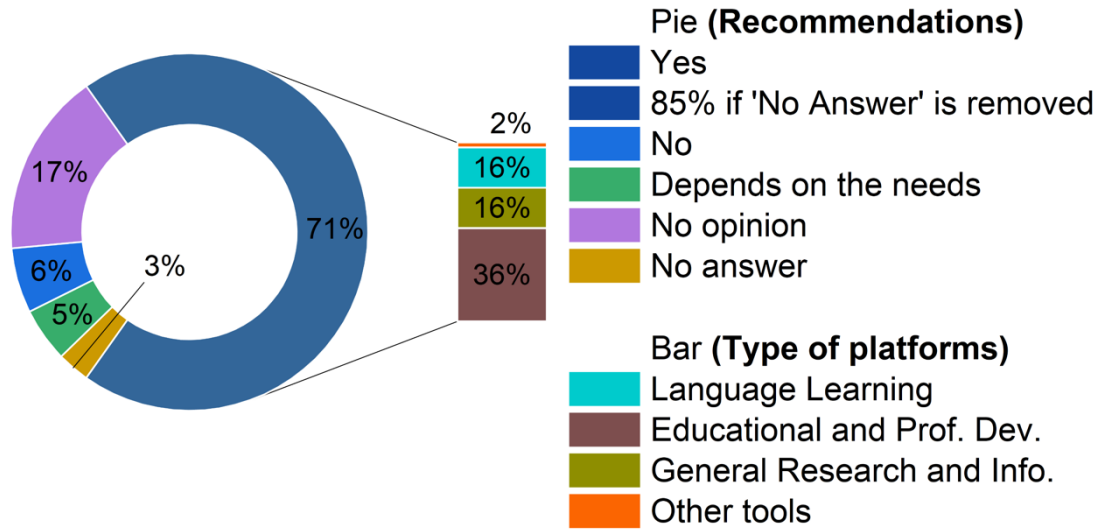


Figure 33. Platform recommendations to others in the user's industry

For the Figure 34. below, respondent were asked the following questions (***Do you have any more comments, insights/suggestions about your experience with such digital cultural intelligence platforms?***)

Further comments and recommendations offered by the respondents: The feedback from the respondents regarding the benefits and limitations of the digital platforms is summarized in Figure 34. 39.8% of respondents reported experiencing significant value, indicating satisfaction with the platforms' role in enhancing cultural intelligence (CQ). According to Asad & McManus (2021), platforms allow people to form friendships with those in different countries, allowing for a better understanding of other cultures. According to Ang and Van Dyne (2008), interactive features available in these platforms facilitate practical and real-time CQ applications to enhance users' cross-cultural awareness and adaptability. Notably, 21.3% of the participants pointed out aspects that could be improved, with 32.4% of respondents calling for more specific content for the industry and 38.2% saying that the content should be more specific for the region. According to Ang and Van Dyne (2015), CQ platforms should continue to evolve to meet the needs of different cultures and areas of many different users, in which case these theories can

be used as specific content for specific sectors or regions, helping the professional to better adapt to the individual differences. Also, 5.6 % of respondents were neutral, which may indicate ambivalence about the influence of the platforms. According to Crowne (2008), satisfaction of users based on the utility value of these tools is primarily localized to whether these tools meet the users' cultural needs.

Notably, the 30.6% who had no further comments leave open the possibility that they were satisfied or that they had less deeply experienced an involvement with the platforms. Costers et al. (2019) highlight the importance of data from the users to improve digital options intended to promote cultural intelligence. Surprisingly, 2.8% did not answer, but this is likely a combination of disengagement with the question and simply not having any salient experiences to report.

Further comments, insights/suggestions on used Platforms

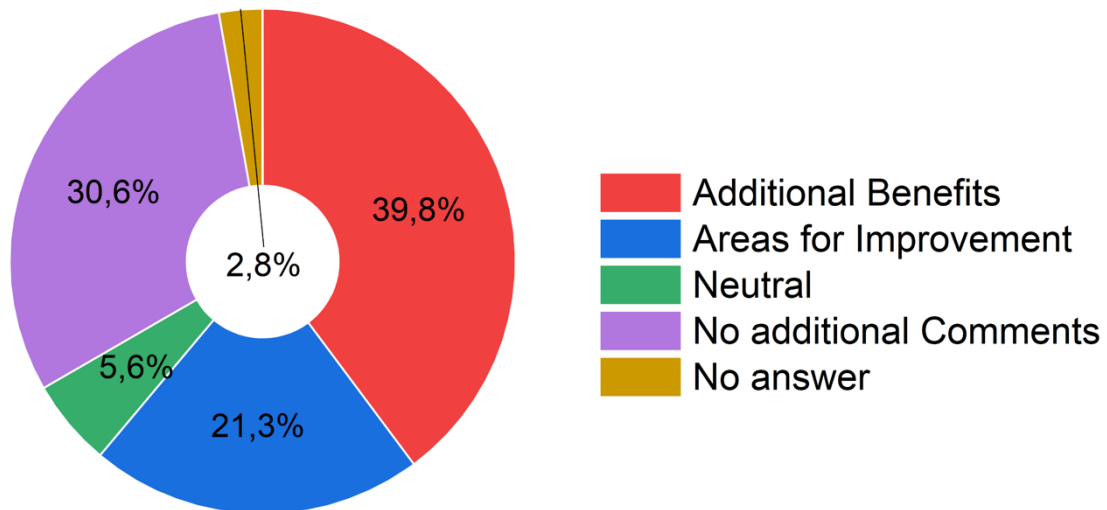


Figure 34. Additional comments and suggestions from respondents

Appendix 4. Coding schema for the thematic analysis

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code	Relevant Quote	Description
Digital Platform Use	Awareness of Digital Platforms	Platform Awareness	<i>"There is such a platform, but I have not used it, as it has not been introduced to the staff."</i> (Transcript 1)	Some organizations have digital cultural intelligence platforms, but employees often lack awareness of their existence.
		Event-Specific Platform Use	<i>"We use platforms like Enterprise Europe Network for matchmaking related to specific events."</i> (Transcript 6)	Digital platforms are frequently tied to specific events, often focusing on industry-related matchmaking or networking.
		Minimal Usage	<i>"I may not need to use the digital cultural intelligence platforms and Google, but I don't feel the need to do so."</i> (Transcript 5)	Some professionals rely more on experience and informal methods for cultural knowledge rather than formal platforms.
		Addressing Biases in Behavior	<i>"We spend time discussing how cultural biases can affect business relationships... These platforms help students realize their own biases and adjust accordingly."</i> (Transcript 7)	The platforms serve as a tool for addressing and reducing biases in international business interactions.

	Self-Initiated Research	Use of Google for Information	"I use Google to browse different sites and do some small research about the country where I'm going." (Transcript 1)	Google is often the go-to resource for professionals gathering cultural information before business trips due to a lack of formal platforms.
		Independent Research	"I go to Google... I browse through different websites to gather the information I need." (Transcript 2)	The interviewee independently searches for cultural information through online platforms.
		Research on Cultural Norms	"Before I travel to any country, I usually do my research and ensure I am conversant with the dos and don'ts." (Transcript 4)	Independent research is frequently conducted to ensure professionals are aware of cultural norms and practices before interacting in a foreign country.
	Platform Features	Desire for Customized Platforms	"It would be great to have a tool... specific to countries, providing clear dos and don'ts." (Transcript 1)	Professionals expressed the need for platforms that provide tailored and specific cultural information based on the country or region of interest.
		Tailored Cultural Tools	"It would be great to have a tool... specific to countries,	There is a need for a more specialized tool focused

			providing clear dos and don'ts." (Transcript 2)	on country-specific cultural intelligence.
		Tools for Learning	"I encourage my MBA students to use cultural awareness tools when discussing biased behavior... It's an important learning tool to understand other cultures." (Transcript 7)	Cultural intelligence platforms are used not just in business but also as learning tools for students, helping them grasp the impact of culture on behavior.
Cultural Awareness Development	Practical Learning	Learning Through Experience	"In Japan, a simple 'yes' doesn't always seal the contract. I had to learn this through experience." (Transcript 1)	Practical experiences, such as negotiations in different countries, often lead to a deeper understanding of cultural differences.
		Trial and Error	"It has been more like trial and error when I went to a new country." (Transcript 5)	Cultural learning is sometimes described as a process of trial and error, especially in new international environments.
	Workshops and Training	Cultural Awareness Workshops	"We prepare these SMEs through various workshops using native speakers who know the dos and don'ts in	Workshops are used to prepare employees or companies for entering international markets, often facilitated by native

			those markets." (Transcript 6)	speakers familiar with the cultural norms.
		Use of Local Experts	"We aim to connect SMEs with individuals who have both research and business expertise, especially when entering new international markets." (Transcript 6)	Connecting with local experts who possess both cultural and business knowledge is seen as crucial for entering new markets successfully.
	Social Integration	Immersion in Local Cultures	"Encouraging students to avoid their own community and immerse themselves in the local culture helps them better understand how things work." (Transcript 8)	Social immersion is an important method for learning cultural norms, often encouraged to deepen understanding and integration in a new country.
		Expatriate Preparation	"We spend time preparing expatriates for the cultural challenges they'll face... Without this preparation, they often struggle." (Transcript 10)	Expatriates need dedicated preparation to handle cultural challenges when working in new environments, ensuring a smoother transition and success.
	Cultural Intelligence Enhancement	International Business Preparation	"By having access to this data platform... I can gain valuable knowledge to prepare myself for my business	Digital platforms help enhance cultural intelligence for international business preparation.

			purposes overseas." (Transcript 1)	
		Developing Global Business Skills	"Students need to learn how to interact with diverse cultures, and these tools give them an idea of what to expect when they start working internationally." (Transcript 7)	Platforms help future professionals prepare for global business environments by familiarizing them with different cultural norms.
		Cultural Knowledge for Business Success	"Companies that don't understand local customs will struggle to build successful relationships... Platforms can help avoid these costly mistakes." (Transcript 9)	Platforms help businesses avoid cultural missteps that could jeopardize partnerships or negotiations in international markets.
Challenges in Platform Use	Accessibility and Customization	Information Gaps	"The information available on different websites is often too general." (Transcript 1)	Existing platforms often lack the detailed, specific information needed to be truly useful for professionals in a cultural context.
		Difficulty Accessing Local Knowledge	"It's not always easy to access the right information... Sometimes the cultural nuances of a region are not well-documented." (Transcript 9)	Accessing culturally nuanced information is difficult, especially when local customs and practices are not well-documented online.

		Internet Re- strictions	"People in China often block websites, so it was impossible to get information." (Transcript 2)	In countries with restricted internet access, obtaining cultural intelligence can be challenging, limiting the availability of necessary information.
	Infor- mation Overload	Too Much In- formation to Sort Through	"There is an information flow and confusion... It's difficult to find spot-on information nowadays." (Transcript 5)	Excessive amounts of available information on platforms can overwhelm users, making it difficult to identify relevant or accurate cultural details.
		Difficulty in Managing Multiple Plat- forms	"We already have so many tools... It can be overwhelming to manage them all and make sure that the information is relevant and up to date." (Transcript 7)	The abundance of digital tools and platforms can overwhelm users, making it hard to ensure information is current and useful.
	Limited Practical- ity	Disconnect Between The- ory and Prac- tice	"Sometimes what you learn from these platforms doesn't translate well into real-life situations... You have to experience the culture firsthand to truly understand it." (Transcript 9)	Theoretical knowledge gained from digital platforms often does not translate perfectly into practical, real-world cultural interactions.

		Disconnect Between Re- search and Practice	"There's often a disconnect between what we study in research and what actually happens in the field... These platforms are good, but they can't replicate real-world experience." (Transcript 10)	While digital platforms are helpful, there is often a gap between academic research and practical application in real-world cultural interactions.
Intercul- tural Com- munica- tion	Adapting Communi- cation Styles	Adjusting to Cultural Norms	"In Africa, it's acceptable to arrive 30 minutes or an hour late. You just have to remain calm and patient." (Transcript 2)	Adapting to different cultural norms, such as punctuality, is crucial for successful intercultural communication and business interactions.
		Negotiation Styles	"A handshake was considered a final contract, but the Finnish project manager required formal documentation." (Transcript 2)	Negotiation and agreement practices differ across cultures, requiring flexibility and awareness in cross-cultural business dealings.
		Understand- ing Hierar- chies	"Some cultures have a hierarchy... whereas others, like in Europe, tend to have flatter organizations." (Transcript 5)	Respect for and understanding of hierarchical differences in various cultures are vital for effective communication and team collaboration.

	Profes- sional Eti- quette	Building Rap- port Through Traditions	"I've learned that it's im- portant to embrace the local traditions... It builds trust and rapport." (Transcript 9)	Embracing local customs and traditions is seen as a keyway to build rapport and trust in international business settings.
Organisa- tional Strategy for Cul- tural Intel- ligence	Integra- tion of Platforms	Incorporating Cultural Intel- ligence in Strategy	"I encourage management to incorporate digital cultural intelligence into the organi- zation's strategy." (Transcript 1)	Organizations benefit from integrating cultural intelligence platforms into their business strategies to foster better communi- cation, negotiation, and client interactions.
		Platforms as a Strategic Tool	"We're using these platforms as a strategic tool to help us grow our business in new markets." (Transcript 9)	Platforms for cultural in- telligence are viewed as strategic tools to support business growth in new in- ternational markets, help- ing companies navigate cultural differences.
	Resistance to Change	Organisa- tional Re- sistance	"Many organizations are re- sistant to change... They see cultural intelligence as a 'nice to have,' not a 'need to have,' which holds them back." (Transcript 9)	Some organizations resist adopting cultural intelli- gence platforms, viewing them as non-essential, which can limit their global business success.

		Insufficient Detail in Available Tools	"The platforms are great for general learning, but they don't go into enough detail for specific cultures... We need something more in-depth for those challenging regions."	Current platforms provide a broad overview but lack the depth needed to fully understand specific cultural challenges, especially in complex regions.
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