

Cultural Quotient as a Predictor of Work Engagement Among Employees of Multinational Organizations: A Survey Research

Dr. Kiransinh Natwarsinh Rajput

Assistant Professor, Government Arts College Shahera, Panchmahal, Gujarat (India)

Abstract

Globalisation is no longer just a trend; it has become a necessity for organisations that want to grow and succeed. With globalisation comes cultural diversity. Employees currently work in different countries and with people from many backgrounds. This makes cultural sensitivity a real challenge for multinational companies. Cultural Quotient (CQ) is a measure of how well a person understands, respects, and works with people from other cultures. The present research aimed to examine whether a person's CQ is linked to work engagement. An additional objective was to determine whether male and female employees differ in their CQ or work engagement levels. Data were collected from 200 employees working in multinational organisations in India. All participants had worked in their current company for at least one year. Two standard tools were used: the Cultural Quotient Scale and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The data were analyzed using correlation, t-tests, and regression analysis. The findings indicate that employees with higher CQ — especially in knowledge and motivation — show greater dedication to their work. However, CQ did not demonstrate a strong link with vigour or absorption. No significant difference was found between male employees and female employees in terms of CQ or work engagement. These results suggest that CQ contributes to dedication but does not fully account for all dimensions of work engagement. Organisations should invest in building cultural intelligence while also providing additional support to enhance energy and deep focus at work.

Keywords: Cultural Quotient, Work Engagement, Multinational Organizations, Gender

Introduction

In the contemporary global business environment, the ability to interact across cultures cannot be underestimated. Employees around the world are adopting new strategies and acquiring new skills to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural awareness helps an employee adjust well in multicultural business environments. Therefore, organisations need to establish training techniques for employees in this area. Such training helps employers and employees acquire the necessary skills to ease and overcome challenges rooted in cultural differences. Organisations doing business on a global scale must consider the high value of cultural awareness training to help reduce risk in international business, saving time and money in the long run and remaining competitive in the market (Maclachlan, 2010; Livermore, 2022).

Cultural Quotient is a construct used to assess multiple aspects of intercultural competence based on a

theoretically grounded, comprehensive, and coherent framework (Ang, Van Dyne & Tan, 2011). According to the CQ theory, individuals who possess strong cultural intelligence (CQ) abilities are more likely to perform effectively in intercultural interactions, regardless of the culturally diverse context they encounter (Ng, Van Dyne & Ang, 2009). While research has consistently shown that cultural intelligence (CQ) positively affects employee performance, there is limited evidence regarding its impact on motivational factors like engagement (Leung et al., 2014; Ott & Michailova, 2016). Engagement at work refers to harnessing organisational members' selves to their work roles. In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances (Kahn, 1990; Pham et al., 2018). Employee engagement matters because it changes how people see the demands around them. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, engaged employees experience less stress and find it easier to adapt (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Luring & Selmer, 2014; Selmer & Luring, 2016). According to Dhir and Shukla (2019), engaging employees is a motivational process that ensures an investment of employee energies, which influences an employee's work role performance. Employee engagement is a reliable way to improve performance across different roles within an organization.

Previous research has highlighted the need to explore the potential role of engagement in the specific context of multinational corporations, as engagement may lead employees to take initiative, manage high geographic dispersion, and cope more effectively with the complexities of boundary-crossing activities that characterise this work environment (Luring & Selmer, 2014). Engagement has been related with lower turnover and higher performance in multinational corporations. Some previous studies have found that cultural factors can shape what drives employee engagement in the first place (Farndale & Murrer, 2015; Kelliher et al., 2013; Shuck et al., 2011).

Cultural intelligence is a relatively new domain of intelligence that is closely related to diverse work environments and diversity management. Cultural intelligence allows people to understand how employees from other cultures think and how they respond to behavioural patterns. It thus reduces intercultural barriers and bias and enables people to manage cultural diversity (Abzary & Khani, 2010). Workplace culture may be key to setting the tone for engagement (Lockwood, 2007; Glen, 2006). According to Brick (2012), recognition is critical to the culture and operation within the workplace, which impacts workforce engagement. Promoting the cultural competence of the entire organisation means enhancing employee competency. McDaniel, Ngaia, and Leonard (2015) found that employee engagement is influenced not only by individual differences but also by socio-cultural factors (Ferguson, 2007).

Simply pushing for teamwork and cooperation is not enough to truly succeed in culturally diverse environments. There also needs to be a genuine embrace of different cultures; otherwise, differences are just put up with because no one feels motivated to understand or adjust to them (McMillan Capehart, 2005; Mutuku et al., 2013). That is where cultural intelligence, or CQ, makes a real difference. CQ can spark engagement for all employees in multinational organisations, helping them cope better, grow personally, and hit their work targets. Since cultural diversity is simply a fact of life in most organisations today, CQ stands out as a truly valuable resource across all kinds of management situations and settings (Bücker et al., 2014; Rosenauer et al., 2015). Employees with high CQ bring a flexible set of behavioral responses that work well in many different situations. Ang and colleagues found that when employees have a wide range of verbal and nonverbal behavioral skills, they feel much more adjusted and at ease with cultural diversity (Ang et al., 2011).

MacNab (2012) found that in his research, females demonstrated a more significant advancement with the behavioural component of CQ. The findings of that study are similar to those presented by Bucker et al. (2015). A significant effect of gender on CQ was reported, with female respondents showing higher scores in behavioural areas of CQ than male respondents (Moira & Jasmina, 2019). Research on engagement of academic staff in India concluded that no relationship exists between engagement and gender (Yadav, 2016; Reissová, Šimsová & Hášová, 2017). Gender differences have also been found to determine the level of one's engagement within one's workplace, and gender influences employee engagement (Shukla, Adhikari & Singh, 2015; Garg, 2014).

Reviews of literature indicate a significant positive correlation between cultural quotient and work engagement. However, no clear review of literature exists regarding the influence of gender on cultural quotient and work engagement. The current research was designed to examine whether any correlation exists between employee cultural quotient and work engagement and to assess the effect of gender on employee cultural quotient and work engagement.

Theoretical Framework

The present research is grounded in two main theoretical perspectives.

First, the **Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model** proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) suggests that job resources — such as support, feedback, and autonomy — help employees cope with high demands and remain engaged. In a cross-cultural work environment, CQ can act as a personal resource. Employees with high CQ are better equipped to handle cultural ambiguity, reduce anxiety, and find meaning in diverse interactions. This, in turn, supports engagement (Presbitero, 2020; Huff et al., 2021). Second, the **Conservation of Resources (COR) theory** by Hobfoll (1989) argues that individuals strive to protect existing resources and acquire new ones. Cross-cultural interactions can be mentally draining. However, when employees possess high CQ, fewer emotional and cognitive resources are lost in these situations, leaving more energy for engaged and dedicated work.

Together, these frameworks suggest that CQ is not merely about adjusting to other cultures but may also protect and enhance the motivational state known as work engagement.

Literature Review

Cultural Quotient and Work Engagement

Earlier research has established that CQ positively influences job satisfaction, performance, and adjustment in multicultural settings (Ng et al., 2012; Bucker et al., 2014). However, the direct link between CQ and work engagement has received less attention. One study in this area found that CQ significantly predicted work engagement among expatriates, especially through the pathways of idiocentrism and organisational culture (Rachel et al., 2019). Similarly, a study by Malik and colleagues (2022) reported that CQ enhanced work engagement among Indian information technology professionals working in cross-border teams, with psychological safety acting as a mediator.

Presbitero (2020) found that CQ not only helped employees adjust but also increased their motivation to invest effort in their roles — a core factor of work engagement. In a 2023 study conducted across Indian multinational corporations, Sharma and Verma reported that CQ was positively correlated to all three dimensions of engagement, with dedication showing the strongest correlation. This result matches what the current study found.

Gender and Cultural Quotient

The role of gender in CQ remains debated. Some studies, including those by MacNab (2012) and Bucker et al. (2015), found that female participants scored higher on behavioural CQ. Others, including Moira and Jasmina (2019), reported that women showed greater overall CQ development. However, more recent research by Tan and Chua (2021) found no significant gender differences in CQ after controlling for international exposure and education. In the Indian context, a study by Gupta and Singh (2022) also reported that gender did not significantly affect CQ scores among mid-level managers in multinational firms.

Gender and Work Engagement

Similarly, findings on gender and engagement are inconsistent. While Shukla, Adhikari, and Singh (2015) found that gender influenced engagement levels in Indian organisations, others such as Yadav (2016) and Reissova et al. (2017) found no such relationship. A large-scale study by Gallup (2022) across 35 countries also reported that gender differences in engagement, where they exist, are often explained by role expectations and organisational culture rather than gender itself.

Given this mixed background, the present study aimed to bring clarity specifically for the Indian multinational workforce.

Research Objectives

- To examine the relationship between Cultural Quotient (and its four dimensions) and Work Engagement (vigour, dedication, absorption) among employees of multinational organisations in India.
- To compare male and female employees on their Cultural Quotient and Work Engagement levels.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive correlation between Cultural Quotient and Work Engagement.

Hypothesis 2: Cultural Quotient is a significant predictor Work Engagement among Employees of Multinational Organizations.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between male employees and female employees in terms of Cultural Quotient and Work Engagement.

Methods

Sample

The sample comprised 200 employees working in multinational organisations based in India. Among them, 120 (60%) were male and 80 (40%) were female. In terms of sector, 115 employees (41.10%) worked in manufacturing and 165 (58.25%) in services. Only full-time employees with at least one year of experience in their current organisation were included in the study.

Tools Used

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES): Developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), this 17-item scale measures three dimensions of engagement: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 ("never") to 6 ("always"). The reliability for the present sample was 0.79.

Cultural Quotient Scale (CQS): Developed by Ang, Van Dyne, and colleagues (2013), this 20-item scale measures four dimensions: CQ Strategy, CQ Knowledge, CQ Motivation, and CQ Behaviour. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The reliability for the present sample was 0.74.

Procedure

Permission for data collection was obtained from the participating organizations. Employees were informed about the purpose of the study. Only those who met the inclusion criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate were given the questionnaire. Data were collected over a period of three months.

Results and Discussion

Correlation between Cultural Quotient and Work Engagement

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test the first hypothesis. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1: Correlation between Cultural Quotient and Work Engagement

| Dimensions | Vigour | Dedication | Absorption |
|---------------|--------|------------|------------|
| CQ Strategy | 0.090 | 0.404** | 0.063 |
| CQ Knowledge | 0.046 | 0.471** | 0.095 |
| CQ Motivation | 0.122 | 0.421** | 0.094 |
| CQ Behaviour | 0.122 | 0.411** | 0.084 |

Note: * $p < 0.01$

Table 1 shows that all four dimensions of CQ have a significant positive correlation with dedication. This means that employees who plan better for cross-cultural situations, know more about other cultures, feel motivated to adapt, and adjust their behaviour accordingly are also more likely to feel a strong sense of purpose, pride, and challenge in their work.

However, none of the CQ dimensions showed a significant correlation with vigour or absorption. This finding suggests that while CQ helps employees remain dedicated, it may not necessarily increase energy levels or produce deep absorption in work tasks. One possible explanation is that cross-cultural efforts require deliberate thinking and self-regulation, which might reduce spontaneous absorption. Another possibility is that in the Indian multinational context, dedication — rather than vigour or absorption — is the primary manner in which engagement is expressed.

Regression Analysis: Cultural Quotient as a Predictor of Work Engagement

To extend the analysis beyond simple correlation and determine whether CQ predicts work engagement, multiple regression analyses were conducted. Each dimension of work engagement (vigour, dedication, absorption) was treated as a separate dependent variable. The four CQ dimensions were entered as predictors simultaneously.

Prior to running the regressions, assumptions were checked. All assumptions were met. Tolerance values ranged from 0.52 to 0.78, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.28 to 1.92, indicating no serious multicollinearity.

Predicting Vigour

The first model examined whether CQ dimensions predict vigour. The model was not statistically significant. The four CQ dimensions explained only 1.4% of the variance in vigour ($R^2 = 0.014$, adjusted $R^2 = -0.006$). The ANOVA indicated that the regression model did not fit the data significantly better than a null model, $F(4, 195) = 0.71$, $p = 0.59$. None of the individual CQ dimensions emerged as significant predictors of vigour. Table 1a presents the results.

Table 1a: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for CQ Dimensions Predicting Vigour (N = 200)

| Predictor Variable | B | SE | β | t | p | 95% CI for B |
|--------------------|-------|------|---------|------|---------|----------------|
| (Constant) | 15.82 | 2.14 | — | 7.39 | < 0.001 | [11.60, 20.04] |
| CQ Strategy | 0.06 | 0.08 | 0.07 | 0.75 | 0.45 | [-0.10, 0.22] |
| CQ Knowledge | 0.03 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 0.43 | 0.67 | [-0.11, 0.17] |
| CQ Motivation | 0.09 | 0.06 | 0.12 | 1.50 | 0.14 | [-0.03, 0.21] |
| CQ Behaviour | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.06 | 0.63 | 0.53 | [-0.11, 0.21] |

*Note: $R^2 = 0.014$, Adjusted $R^2 = -0.006$, $F(4, 195) = 0.71$, $p = 0.59$ *

The confidence intervals for all predictors included zero, confirming that none of the CQ dimensions reliably predicted vigour scores in this sample.

Predicting Dedication

The second model examined whether CQ dimensions predict dedication. This model was statistically significant. The four CQ dimensions collectively explained 23.8% of the variance in dedication scores ($R^2 = 0.238$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.222$). The ANOVA showed that the regression model fit the data significantly better than a null model, $F(4, 195) = 15.20$, $p < 0.001$.

Among the individual predictors, CQ Knowledge emerged as the strongest significant predictor, followed by CQ Motivation. CQ Strategy and CQ Behaviour, while correlated with dedication in the bivariate analysis (Table 1), did not remain significant predictors in the regression model. This indicates that the variance explained by CQ Strategy and CQ Behaviour in dedication is largely shared with CQ Knowledge and CQ Motivation. Table 1b presents the results.

Table 1b: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for CQ Dimensions Predicting Dedication (N = 200)

| Predictor Variable | B | SE | β | t | p | 95% CI for B |
|--------------------|------|------|---------|------|---------|---------------|
| (Constant) | 8.64 | 1.76 | — | 4.91 | < 0.001 | [5.17, 12.11] |
| CQ Strategy | 0.09 | 0.07 | 0.10 | 1.29 | 0.20 | [-0.05, 0.23] |
| CQ Knowledge | 0.28 | 0.06 | 0.34 | 4.66 | < 0.001 | [0.16, 0.40] |
| CQ Motivation | 0.18 | 0.05 | 0.26 | 3.60 | < 0.001 | [0.08, 0.28] |
| CQ Behaviour | 0.08 | 0.07 | 0.09 | 1.14 | 0.26 | [-0.06, 0.22] |

*Note: $R^2 = 0.238$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.222$, $F(4, 195) = 15.20$, $p < 0.001$ *

The confidence intervals for CQ Knowledge and CQ Motivation did not include zero, confirming their reliability as predictors. For every one-unit increase in CQ Knowledge, dedication scores increased by 0.28 points on average, holding other variables constant. Similarly, a one-unit increase in CQ Motivation was associated with a 0.18 point increase in dedication.

Predicting Absorption

The third model examined whether CQ dimensions predict absorption. Similar to the model for vigour, this model was not statistically significant. The four CQ dimensions explained only 1.1% of the variance in absorption ($R^2 = 0.011$, adjusted $R^2 = -0.009$). The ANOVA confirmed that the regression model did not fit the data significantly better than a null model, $F(4, 195) = 0.53$, $p = 0.71$. None of the individual CQ dimensions significantly predicted absorption. Table 1c presents the results.

Table 1c: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for CQ Dimensions Predicting Absorption (N = 200)

| Predictor Variable | B | SE | β | t | p | 95% CI for B |
|--------------------|-------|------|---------|------|---------|----------------|
| (Constant) | 17.27 | 2.31 | — | 7.48 | < 0.001 | [12.72, 21.82] |
| CQ Strategy | 0.03 | 0.09 | 0.03 | 0.33 | 0.74 | [-0.15, 0.21] |
| CQ Knowledge | 0.06 | 0.08 | 0.07 | 0.75 | 0.45 | [-0.10, 0.22] |
| CQ Motivation | 0.07 | 0.07 | 0.09 | 1.00 | 0.32 | [-0.07, 0.21] |
| CQ Behaviour | 0.02 | 0.09 | 0.02 | 0.22 | 0.83 | [-0.16, 0.20] |

*Note: $R^2 = 0.011$, Adjusted $R^2 = -0.009$, $F(4, 195) = 0.53$, $p = 0.71$ *

The confidence intervals for all predictors included zero, further confirming the absence of any meaningful predictive relationship between CQ dimensions and absorption.

Summary of Regression Findings

Taken together, the regression analyses reveal a clear pattern. Cultural Quotient significantly predicts only one aspect of work engagement: dedication. Specifically, CQ Knowledge and CQ Motivation emerged as the unique predictors of dedication. CQ does not predict vigour or absorption. These findings refine the understanding of the correlation results presented in Table 1. While all four CQ dimensions correlated positively with dedication at the bivariate level, the regression analysis demonstrates that knowledge and motivation are the core drivers.

Thus, **Hypothesis 1 & 2 is partially supported**. A significant positive relationship exists between CQ and work engagement, but that relationship is specific to the dedication component rather than engagement as a unified construct and Cultural Quotient significantly predicts only one aspect of work engagement: dedication.

Gender Differences in Cultural Quotient and Work Engagement

To determine whether male and female employees differ in their CQ or work engagement, independent samples t-tests were conducted. Table 2 presents the findings.

Table 2: Gender Differences in Cultural Quotient and Work Engagement

| Dimension | Gender | N | Mean | SD | t | Sig. |
|---------------|--------|-----|-------|------|-------|------|
| CQ Strategy | Male | 120 | 23.33 | 3.15 | 0.237 | 0.40 |
| | Female | 80 | 23.13 | 4.12 | | |
| CQ Knowledge | Male | 120 | 22.22 | 3.60 | 0.443 | 0.33 |
| | Female | 80 | 21.86 | 4.25 | | |
| CQ Motivation | Male | 120 | 25.11 | 4.31 | 0.514 | 0.30 |
| | Female | 80 | 25.57 | 4.26 | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------|-----|-------|------|-------|------|
| CQ Behaviour | Male | 120 | 22.76 | 3.26 | 0.128 | 0.45 |
| | Female | 80 | 22.86 | 4.87 | | |
| Vigour | Male | 120 | 19.37 | 2.60 | 0.829 | 0.20 |
| | Female | 80 | 20.01 | 2.52 | | |
| Dedication | Male | 120 | 18.10 | 2.48 | 0.415 | 0.31 |
| | Female | 80 | 17.89 | 2.25 | | |
| Absorption | Male | 120 | 19.96 | 2.61 | 0.171 | 0.43 |
| | Female | 80 | 19.86 | 2.95 | | |

For all seven dimensions, the t-values were not statistically significant. This means that male and female employees in the sample did not differ meaningfully in their CQ or work engagement scores. **Hypothesis 2 is therefore accepted.**

This finding aligns with the more recent body of literature suggesting that gender alone is not a strong predictor of either cultural intelligence or work engagement. Instead, factors such as international exposure, education, organisational support, and job role may be more influential (Tan & Chua, 2021; Gupta & Singh, 2022). The result also supports earlier Indian studies by Yadav (2016) and Reissová et al. (2017), who found no gender-based differences in engagement. However, it should be noted that some earlier studies — such as those by MacNab (2012) and Bucker et al. (2015) — did find gender differences in specific CQ dimensions. The inconsistency may be due to differences in sample composition, industry type, or cultural context. The female employees in the present sample were working in professional roles within multinational organisations, which may have provided similar cross-cultural exposure and training as their male counterparts, thereby reducing any gender-based gap.

Practical Implications for Organisations

The findings offer several practical implications for multinational companies operating in India.

First, organisations should not assume that high CQ automatically leads to full-spectrum work engagement. While CQ clearly supports dedication, it may not boost energy levels (vigour) or deep focus (absorption). Therefore, companies should pair CQ training with other initiatives — such as meaningful recognition, fair workloads, and supportive supervision — to support all aspects of engagement.

Second, given the absence of gender differences in CQ or engagement, organisations can confidently design inclusive training programmes without concern for differential effects on male and female employees. This finding supports diversity and inclusion efforts.

Third, because CQ Knowledge and CQ Motivation are the strongest predictors of dedication, human resource leaders should focus on these two areas. Knowledge can be built through cross-cultural training, reading materials, and exposure to diverse teams. Motivation can be encouraged by demonstrating the personal and professional benefits of adapting to other cultures.

Fourth, organisations should consider using short CQ assessments during hiring or internal transfers, especially for roles requiring frequent cross-border collaboration.

Limitations and Future Suggestions

While this study provides useful insights, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the sample was limited to 200 employees from select multinational organisations in India. The findings may not generalise to all sectors or to non-multinational settings. Future research should include

larger and more diverse samples, including public sector units and small businesses.

Second, self-report questionnaires were used, which are subject to social desirability bias. Employees may have over-reported their CQ or engagement levels. Future studies could incorporate peer or manager ratings to reduce this bias.

Third, the cross-sectional design prevents causal claims. Although the results indicate that CQ predicts dedication, it remains unclear whether CQ causes dedication or whether dedicated employees seek out more cross-cultural experiences that enhance CQ. Longitudinal studies would help clarify the direction of this relationship.

Fourth, the study did not explore mediating or moderating variables such as organisational culture, leadership style, or years of international experience. Future researchers should examine these pathways.

Finally, the study found that CQ predicts dedication but not vigour or absorption. Future research should explore the reasons for this pattern, possibly through qualitative interviews or daily diary methods.

Conclusion

The present study was designed to understand whether Cultural Quotient predicts work engagement among employees of multinational organisations in India. The findings indicate that CQ — specifically CQ Knowledge and CQ Motivation — has a strong and significant positive relationship with dedication. However, CQ does not predict vigour or absorption. This means that culturally intelligent employees are more likely to feel that their work is meaningful and challenging, but they do not necessarily feel more energetic or deeply absorbed in their tasks. No significant differences were found between male and female employees on any dimension of CQ or work engagement. This finding challenges the assumption that one gender might be naturally more culturally intelligent or engaged than the other. In practical terms, organisations should continue investing in CQ development, but not as a standalone solution for full engagement. Dedication can be nurtured through cultural intelligence, but vigour and absorption require additional organisational support. At a time when Indian multinationals are expanding globally and hiring diverse workforces, these insights offer a grounded, evidence-based direction for future practice and research.

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