

Cultural Intelligence: Leveraging Differences to Bridge the Gap in the International Hospitality Industry

Pallvi Arora* and Neelu Rohmetra**

Globalization has made the world seem smaller and 'flat' in many ways (Friedman, 2005). Still cultural differences and cultural diversity remains a challenge to be faced by individuals and organizations. Managers recognize cultural differences when they realize that people from different cultures behave differently and that those differences affect the way in which their organizations function (Adler, 2007). This challenge of handling and managing multiculturalism is experienced invariably in all sectors of service industry including hospitality. Hotels and other sectors of hospitality have to duly engage in effective management of cultural disparities deeply rooted in the multicultural contexts to the advantage of the organizations at the individual, group and systems level. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is one of the key managerial competencies needed for dealing effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds across sectors and industries including hospitality. This paper introduces the concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and discusses its relevance and implications in the hospitality sector from service encounter perspective. Besides, it seeks to propose a model highlighting CQ as a critical individual capability affecting service encounters for leveraging differences in bridging cultural disparities in organizations with special reference to the international hospitality industry.

Field of Research: Management, Cultural Intelligence, International Hospitality Industry, Culture, Cultural Diversity.

1. Introduction

Business in the global context has implicitly increased the interest in the cross cultural management research. In the wake of recognition of diversity being seen as an advantage, the need to deal effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds has become cardinal for ensuring success. The words multiculturalism, multinational, internationalization and globalization are no longer strange words. With the advent of globalization, people, invariably in all sectors of business, belonging to different cultural backgrounds are working together to ensure business success.

With the growth in the service sector internationally, there has been a substantial need to deal and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. People belonging to different nationalities possess varying cultural backgrounds and therefore contrasting beliefs, values, attitudes, perceptions, expectations and varying underlying assumptions. Hotels and other sectors of hospitality are faced with the challenges of cross cultural service encounters and continuously need to assess

*Pallvi Arora, The Business School, Faculty of Management Studies, University of Jammu, Jammu, India.
Email : pallvi.arora12@gmail.com

**Prof. Neelu Rohmetra, Director, International Centre for Cross Cultural Research and Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management Studies, University of Jammu, Jammu, India.
Email: nrohmetra@yahoo.co.uk

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their performance against the expectations of their customers, employees and suppliers from a diverse background (Mohsin, 2006). The acknowledgement of such variations that exist in the outcomes resulting from cultural differences is eminent as it helps to closely understand the needs of your customers and others and meet their cultural expectations too. Thus, culture can be the source of cooperation, cohesion and progress, instead of conflict, disintegration and failure (Harris, 2004).

In the service management literature, the term 'service encounter' is widely established and indicates the contact between customer and service provider (Stauss and Mang, 1999). Service encounters in the hospitality industry are significant as they enable the promotion of hotel services, creating a positive impression on the customer and also enhancing the overall image of the property. Other factors also play a role in creating an impression on the customer, but it is essentially the interaction between the service staff and the customers that decide the outcome of the service encounter, especially where the role of culture in such interactions intermediates. Thus, the customer's perception of what constitutes good service quality inevitably is culture bound (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996).

The role of the service providers, therefore, takes a foot forward when dealing with international customers. If service managers are unaware of the core cultural expectations of customers, it will result in gap of performance of service (Mohsin, 2006). Thus, when considering the case of the international hospitality industry, it becomes important to understand that in order to benefit from the cross cultural interactions between the service provider and the customers, an "intermediary factor" or element is needed that can help to develop a link between the understanding of cultural issues by the service provider, on one hand, and the customer's cultural expectations on the other. Therefore, cultural differences need to be respected and accommodated for, while transacting in the business of tourism or hospitality.

However, one of the key managerial competencies that is needed for dealing effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds is "Cultural Intelligence". Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a person's capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity. It aims at providing a new insight into the social skills and development of mental frameworks that help in bridging cultural differences. Cultural Intelligence consists of specific knowledge about different cultures as well as general knowledge about how cultures work. It explains how some individuals are more capable of navigating in the culturally diverse environment than others.

CQ is relevant for global leaders, expatriates, professionals dealing with global contacts, members of multi cultural teams, travelers or any other person dealing across national and/or cultural backgrounds. If Cultural Intelligence is woven in the fabric of the organizations, it shall enable the managers to effectively handle cultural variations and differences. When the managers develop the capability of acknowledging these differences, they shall become capable of lowering the cultural barriers that may be created and predict what the customers are thinking and how they shall react to their behavioral patterns. Also, employees learn from such multicultural experiences, the art of harnessing the power of cultural diversity. Thus, Cultural Intelligence is the ability to understand the alliance between cultural issues

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on one hand and business issues on the other. The intricate task lies in understanding both the issues and putting them together without losing out whom you are dealing with in the process. As far as dealing with global customers is concerned, it is best to create a map of the cultures one is dealing with and then identifying how they are different or similar from each other and how this knowledge must be tapped in order to bring customer satisfaction.

However, such interactions with global customers are extremely relevant and essential while transacting in a people intensive sector like hospitality. There has been an exponential growth in the need for hospitality services in almost every country in the world. In response to this global need, and to take the advantage of the changing social phenomena, the definition of hospitality has expanded nationally and internationally. Firms, customers, and employees have all become international and multicultural (Kandampully, 2002). Most deluxe hotels anywhere in the world expect a significant proportion of their customers to be foreign. This is where the role of Cultural Intelligence comes into play in the context of bridging the gaps and acting as an “intermediary factor” to extract the benefits of cultural diversity in the international hospitality industry.

The present piece of research has been presented in this backdrop, wherein the role of Cultural Intelligence, as a behavioral intervention is seen as cardinal to developing cultural understanding in context of efficient management of organizational deliveries. The paper has been presented in the following paragraphs under eight sections viz; Introduction, Problem Statement, Research Objective and Aim, Research Method, Literature Review, Implications of Cultural Intelligence for the International Hospitality Industry, Conclusions & Recommendations and Limitations and Future Research Directions.

2. Problem Statement

The authors identified that managers in the international hospitality industry experience problems when dealing with customers from diverse cultural backgrounds which implies a set of varying cultural values, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, expectations and basic underlying assumptions. When the interaction between the service provider and the customer on the grounds of cultural expectations is not successful, it leads to the failure of the service encounter, creates dissatisfaction and also leaves an impression on the customer, which is not appropriate or desirable. One reason behind such a failure of the service encounter could be that the managers are not “culturally intelligent” to deal with the global customer. Thus, if the managers develop the skills to become “culturally intelligent” the possibility of getting positive and fruitful outcomes, increases. Also, the employees learn the art of harnessing and extracting the benefits of cultural diversity.

3. Research Objective and Aim

The research objective is to identify, in terms of the relevant literature, whether individuals, employees, customers and suppliers, associated with the international hospitality industry need to be culturally intelligent in order to be successful in cross cultural interactions.

By identifying and reviewing various core themes in literature, it is hoped to assess the current status of Cultural Intelligence in the respective industry. This would provide a basis to reach some conclusions and identify how Cultural Intelligence can be used to leverage differences, on the basis of cultural diversity, in the international hospitality industry.

4. Research Method

The review of the theoretical global relevant literature shall provide an insight about the conceptual framework of Cultural Intelligence (CQ), its current applications and usage, the understanding of cultural differences in the context of service encounters in the international hospitality industry. Also, research engines such as Google, Emerald and published works of renowned theorists in the respective field shall be incorporated.

Literature on Cultural Intelligence is available between the period 2003-2010 as the concept is relatively new and that on the impact of culture on the respective industry and service encounters from the year 1988 onwards.

Researchers on Cultural Intelligence have provided for conducting researches in the service sector. Therefore, the relevance for choosing the International Hospitality industry can be delineated on the fact that the industry is composed of individuals who come from diverse cultural backgrounds and that it is relevant to acknowledge the differences that exist in their approach towards customer related outcomes in order to ensure success.

On the basis of the literature, theoretical models are created to understand the relationship between Cultural Intelligence and its applicability in the International Hospitality sector.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Cultural Intelligence

Business has always been about competing for markets, territories and most of all, customers. Today's customer expectations are higher than ever before, and the range of choices open to them is wider than ever before (Brown, 1991). Therefore, it becomes necessary to identify "who is your customer?" .With the increasing impact of globalization the world seems small in many ways. Still, cultural diversity remains a challenge to be dealt by individuals and organizations. Thus, your customer may be of the same nationality or belong to a different country or a different cultural background. The extent to which a manager or an employee understands his customer and satisfies him, elicits his level of Cultural Intelligence. Consequently, there is a strong need to hire and maintain global leaders and workers proficient in global knowledge of international business processes, such as consumer demands and etiquette in various cultures (Harvey, Buckley, & Novicevic, 2000).

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Cultural Intelligence is relevant and also essential for those who deal with people from different cultures. According to Earley and Ang (2003), CQ is “a person’s capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context”. It recognizes the skills and characteristics required to work effectively with international clients, and partners. As an individual difference capability, CQ reflects what a person can do in culturally diverse settings. Thus, it is distinct from stable personality traits which can describe what a person typically does across time and across situations (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Still some personality traits may relate to CQ.

Earley and Ang (2003) conceptualized CQ as comprising of four facets, namely meta cognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral dimensions which have relevance to functioning in culturally diverse situations. Meta-cognitive CQ reflects mental process that individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge including knowledge and control over individual thought processes (Flavell, 1979) relating to culture. Those with high meta- cognitive CQ are consciously aware of other’s cultural preferences before and after interactions (Ang et al., 2007).

Cognitive CQ focuses on the knowledge of the norms, practices and conventions in different cultures acquired from education and professional experiences (Ang et al., 2007). This includes the knowledge of the economic, legal and social systems of different cultures and subcultures (Triandis, 1994) and knowledge of the basic frameworks of cultural values (e.g., Hofstede, 2001). Those with high cognitive CQ understand similarities and differences across cultures (Brislin et al., 2006).

Motivational CQ reflects the capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences (Ang et al., 2007). Those with high motivational CQ direct attention and energy toward cross cultural situations based on intrinsic interest (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and confidence in their cross cultural effectiveness (Bandura, 2002).

Behavioral CQ reflects the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures (Ang et al., 2007). Those with high behavioral CQ exhibit situationally appropriate behaviors based on broad range of verbal and non-verbal capabilities such as exhibiting culturally appropriate words, tones, gestures and facial expressions (Gudykunst et al., 1988).

The four dimensions of CQ are qualitatively different facets of the overall capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings (Earley and Ang, 2003). The amalgamation of all these four elements produces a powerful and systematic framework for understanding why individuals vary in their effectiveness in coping with novel cultural settings. However, research on individual capabilities for individual effectiveness is sparse and unsystematic, leaving an important gap in our understanding of why some individuals are more effective than others in culturally diverse situations (Ang et al., 2007).

Ang et al. (2006) demonstrated that the four dimensions of CQ were distinct from, and yet related to, more distal Big Five personality traits in conceptually meaningful ways. In another study, Sternberg & Grigorenko (2006) points out, “Someone could

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be relatively successful across cultures but not highly successful within any one of those cultures”.

Based on Gardner’s (1984) multiple intelligences theory, Peterson (2004) identified four dimensions of CQ: (a) linguistic intelligence refers to the language skills needed to interact with people from other cultures, but one does not have to speak a second language fluently to have cultural intelligence; (b) spatial intelligence refers to the ability to adapt spatial behaviors in other cultural settings; (c) intrapersonal intelligence refers to the ability to know one’s own cultural style; and (d) interpersonal intelligence refers to the ability to respond appropriately to others.

According to Thomas and Inkson (2004), a manager who is high on CQ will first be knowledgeable about the cultures and fundamental issues in cross cultural interactions; second, be mindful of what is going on in intercultural situations, having a sensitivity to cues and an ability to interpret them to respond appropriately to different inter-cultural situations. Thus, higher CQ can strengthen workplace communication and build solid business relationships.

Ng and Earley (2006) discussed conceptual distinctions between CQ, a culture-free etic construct, and the traditional view of intelligence that is culture-bound and emic; Triandis (2006) discussed theoretical relationships between CQ capabilities and forming accurate judgments; Brislin et al. (2006) discussed Cultural Intelligence (CQ) as critical for expecting the unexpected during intercultural encounters. Earley and Peterson (2004) developed a systematic approach to intercultural training that links trainee CQ strengths and weaknesses to training interventions.

Janssens and Brett (2006) advanced a fusion model of team collaboration for making culturally intelligent, creatively realistic team decisions. Thus being cognisant of the importance of CQ will be critical factor in providing the service.

Ang et al. (2007) conducted three substantive studies in Singapore and US across different cultural, educational and work settings which demonstrate a systematic pattern of relationships between dimensions of CQ and specific intercultural effectiveness outcomes. It has also helped to describe the development and cross validation of the 20-item Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) and test substantive predictions based on integration of the intelligence and inter cultural competencies literatures. The multidimensional conceptualization of CQ and the differential relationships of the dimensions of CQ with specific intercultural effectiveness outcomes suggest the importance of continuing to theorize about and examine CQ as a multidimensional construct, where specific dimensions of CQ have special relevance to different outcomes.

Ang and Inkpen (2008) developed a conceptual framework of firm- level cultural intelligence and also discussed its relevance in the context of global business ventures like offshoring which consisted of three dimensions of intercultural capabilities of the firm: managerial, competitive and structural.

Menon and Narayanan (2008) discuss the applicability of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) to understand it’s relation to outcomes in culture-specific contexts. The authors have

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theoretically examined the relationship between Cultural Intelligence and cultural differences to identify the organizational outcomes that could be interpreted for future research.

Ng et al. (2009) provides an expanded conceptualization of cosmopolitan human capital to include international experiences and cultural intelligence capabilities as today's globalized world not just needs to be acquainted with the technological knowledge and skills alone but also the skills needed to work in culturally diverse situations. Also, Ng et al. (in press) proposed a model of cultural intelligence as a moderator that increases the likelihood on the grounds that international assignments will engage in four stages of experiential learning (experience, reflect, conceptualize, experiment), which will lead to global leadership, efficacy, ethno-relative attitudes toward other cultures, accurate mental models of leadership across cultures, and flexibility of leadership styles.

Van Dyne et al. (2010) focuses on Cultural Intelligence as the capability to make oneself understood and lead in culturally diverse situations and display appropriate behaviors in situations characterized by cultural diversity.

Despite the newness of the construct, empirical research on CQ is promising. Ang et al. (2007) found CQ to be significant in explaining the variance in performance. Thus, researchers in this area have consistently suggested for more research to address both the measurement issues as well as the substantive issues to pursuit of CQ construct validity (see Ang et al., 2004).

5.2 Impact of Culture on the International Hospitality Industry and Service Encounters

Business success in the 21st century will be dependent on how individuals and organizations acquire and practice cross-cultural sensitivity and skills in dealing with customers from diverse backgrounds (Harris, 2004). Thus, it is of great significance to identify the impact of culture on the international hospitality industry where individuals come across customers, employees and others belonging to varying cultural backgrounds.

When people are aware of the potential differences in thought processes, they tend to make isomorphic attributions, defined as interpreting behavior from the actor's perspective and giving it the same meaning as intended by the actor (Triandis, 2006). This holds true for the hospitality sector where the customer may belong to a different cultural background and the employee takes the challenge of addressing the needs of the customers and bringing him satisfaction, contentment and most importantly, meeting his cultural expectations. When customer expectations are not met this often leads to disappointments, fear, loneliness which can result in cultural conflicts (Weiermair, 2000).

Hospitality services are "high contact" services with a high degree of human involvement and face to face contact (Lovelock, Patterson, and Walker, 2001). If the service provider and the customer come from different cultural backgrounds, there

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can be serious implications with regard to the most important of hospitality issues- the perception of service delivery (Strauss and Mang, 1999).

Numerous researchers have attempted to apply Customer Satisfaction theories developed by consumer behaviorists in the areas of tourism (Pizam and Milman, 1993; Danaher and Arweiler, 1996; Ryan and Cliff, 1997; Hudson and Shepard, 1998) in order to investigate Customer Satisfaction applicability to the hospitality and tourism industries. These researchers point out that the organizations must set their customer satisfaction levels and a complete understanding of who is their customer. They must always set their benchmarks and identify competitive advantages they can have over the others while dealing with customers, including customers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In the hospitality industry the true measure of any company's success lies in an organization's ability to continuously satisfy customers to gain a competitive edge by acknowledging and managing customers of different cultural backgrounds (Kandampully et al., 2001). Global customers have different expectations and different ways of evaluating performance (Vavra, 1997). When designing global customer satisfaction measurements, regional and cultural aspects must be taken into account. And indeed, studies conducted by Chadee and Mattson (1995) and Scott and Shieff (1993) found significant cross-cultural differences when measuring customer satisfaction. Services and products important to Asians may be completely different from those sought by Europeans. Culture holds an impact upon the perception and problem solving of global customers leading to a difference in the satisfaction level for the same service. In this context, Heo et al. (2004) points out that tourism providers must be able to accommodate culturally based needs in order to tap into the increasingly lucrative market of international travelers. Thus the employees need to be culturally intelligent in order to deal with such customers. Since, cultures differ in their norms for appropriate behaviors (Hall, 1959; Triandis, 1994), the ability to display a flexible range of behaviors is creating positive impressions and developing inter-cultural relationships (Gudykunst et al., 1988).

Strauss and Mang (1999) in discussing service quality, stated two mutually dependent variables presenting perspective of two interactions in service encounters, which may become a cause of two main problem areas:

- Problems appear because the performance of the domestic service provider does not meet the expectations of the foreign customer (inter-cultural provider performance gap)
- It is possible that the service cannot be fulfilled at usual performance level because the foreign customers do not maintain the role behavior expected by domestic supplier (inter-cultural customer performance gap).

Mattila (1999) studied the influence of culture on consumer perceptions of service encounters. In his study he pointed out with relation to hotel industry that because first class hotel services are delivered by people, cultural factors are likely to mediate the hotel customers' attitude toward the service component of their service experience.

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Mattila (2000) states that today's hospitality managers need to be aware of the parts of consumer experience that are open to cultural influences in contrast to those that remain stable across cultures.

Barker and Hartel (2004) in reporting the service experiences of culturally diverse consumers in multicultural society of Australia stated that on the basis of the service provider behavior (both verbal and non-verbal), culturally diverse customers perceive they are the recipients of inequitable service and consequently experience low levels of satisfaction.

Harris (2004) states that a world class hotel or any hospitality organization may assess its own status of cultural sensitivity by asking the following questions:

- Does the way of doing business in your hotel suffer severely from cultural lag?
- Do the hotel managers seek to understand the culture of customers, employees and suppliers?
- Do the hotel managers utilize cultural analysis and insights in terms of their own management styles and public relations?
- Do the hotel managers realize the value of cultural differences and promote cultural synergy?

Research indicates that cross culturally sensitive employees provide to customers better service. They are able to adjust to their serving styles to meet the needs of their foreign customers. Such an act is extremely beneficial for any hotel as such employees are able to generate more revenue for the hotel through their impression on hotel guests and suggestion selling (Mohsin, 2006).

But, despite the importance and relevance of this topic, however, very little research has examined the influence of culture on service perceptions (Malhotra, Ugaldo, Agarwal, and Baalbaki, 1994) and our understanding of how customers from different countries evaluate service encounters is very limited (Winsted, 1997)

6. Implications of Cultural Intelligence for the International Hospitality Industry

On the basis of the review of literature, it is implied that the international hospitality being composed of people who belong to different cultural backgrounds, it becomes important to acknowledge the differences in order to succeed. Therefore, be it in relation to the impediments such as language (verbal/ non verbal) or an inability to appreciate the mindset behind the behavior of the persons one is dealing with from another cultural background, most managers will realize quite quickly that they need some knowledge about those people's cultural background and an improved mindfulness in reading the signals they are sending.

As a result, it enables the managers to leverage the differences that exist on the basis of culture in the form of values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, communication, personal space, language, dress, religion, etc.

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The quality of employee-customer interactions (also known as service encounters) have been recognized as the key strategic competitive weapon for service organizations. In multicultural service organizations, benefits may be derived from such interactions, when a great deal of importance is given to acknowledging the cultural differences and meeting cultural expectations. Ignorance of core cultural values and components can lead to unhappy customers and sometimes even lost business.

Thus, it is important to understand how it is indispensable for the hospitality organizations to embrace diversity, not only to strengthen its businesses and give it a competitive advantage, but also because it is the most appropriate thing to do.

Research indicates that employees who are culturally sensitive provide better service. Such employees are capable of adjusting their service style in order to meet the cultural needs and expectations of their customers and delight them. Such act usually tends to help generate more revenue for the hotel through this impression on hotel guests.

Thus, Cultural Intelligence (CQ) provides an opportunity to interact effectively with diverse cultures through sensitivity, adaptability and learning to embrace a diverse cultural heritage that is rewarding, stimulating and empowering. Leveraging differences in the workplace through Cultural Intelligence is a mechanism for change.

On the basis of the available literature, a model has been developed in order to determine how Cultural Intelligence can help to develop a successful hospitality organization (see Fig. 1).

The model contains three basic functions: antecedents, processes and outcomes. The antecedents consist of the configuration of the individuals with Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and others without it. The processes include employee-related processes or inputs. The outcomes include customer related outcomes as well as the organizational advantages or disadvantages. Also, the model contains a service encounter function which gives rise to the outcomes in the international hospitality industry.

The model states that in the presence of the antecedents that give rise to the processes, when a cross- cultural service encounter takes place, it gives rise to certain outcomes. It is observed that if an individual in an organization is culturally intelligent, i.e., he possess the meta- cognitive, cognitive, behavioral and motivational aspects of the Cultural Intelligence function, he is capable of providing an input which is consistent of the individual aspects to the CQ functions. The employee related processes or inputs consist of sub-functions of the CQ functions.

Meta-cognitive function consists of awareness, planning and checking. Cognitive function consists of the cultural systems, cultural norms and values. Motivational function consists of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors of an individual as well as self efficacy. Finally, the behavioral aspect consists of the verbal as well as the non-

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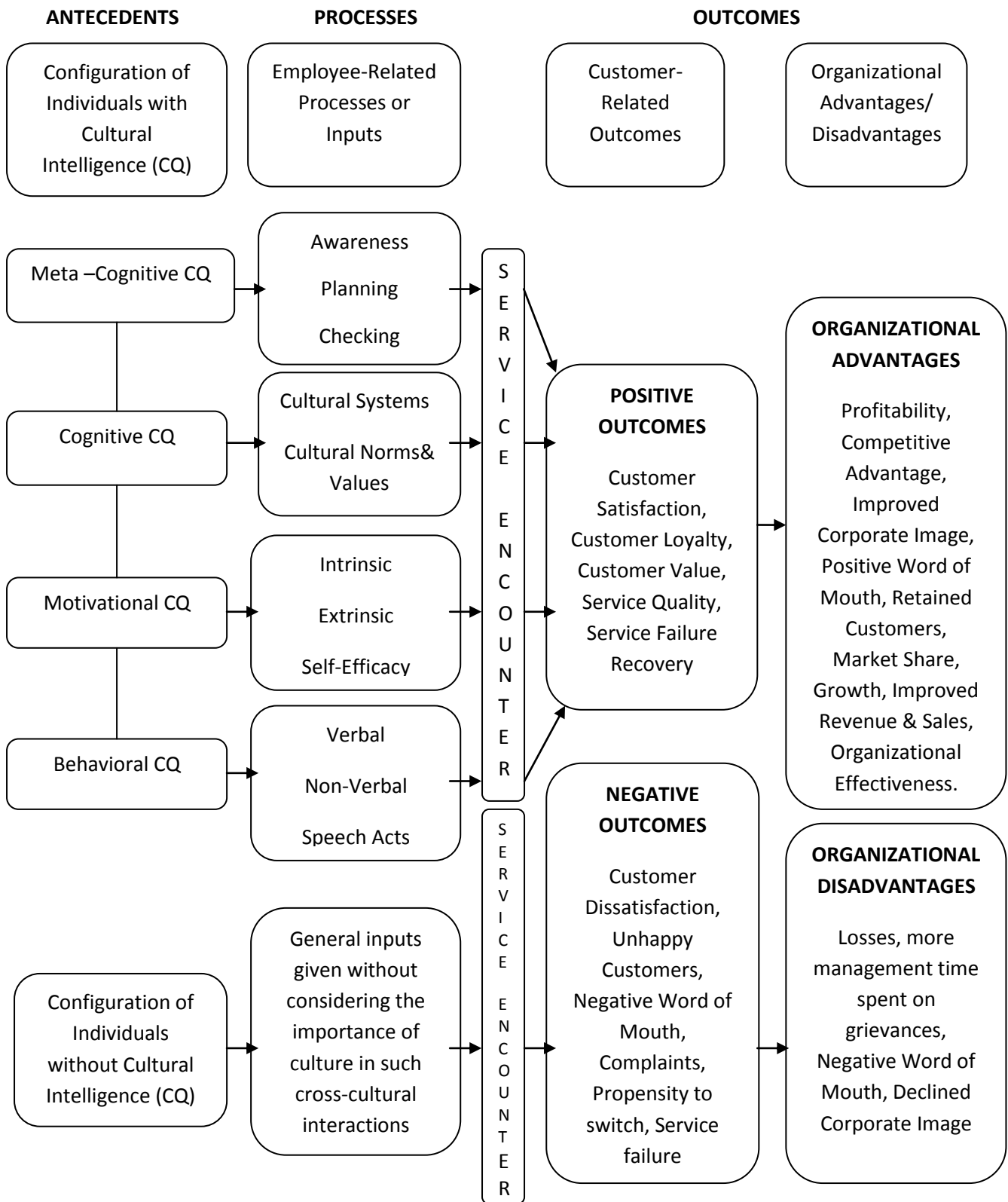
verbal cues and the various speech acts to be incorporated during a service encounter.

When a service encounter between the culturally intelligent employees and the customers takes place in the international hospitality industry, it produces outcomes for the customers along with the organization. The impact of such encounter is a positive customer-related outcome. The cultural expectations of the customers are met due to the employee being culturally intelligent in order to satisfy the needs of their customers in the form of meeting their expectations in the lines of their cultural orientation.

The positive outcomes, so produced are Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Customer Value, Service Quality and Service Failure Recovery and therefore, happy customers. The further impact that such an encounter has, is the organizational advantage being created due to the positive impact on the customers. This includes Profitability, Competitive Advantage, Improved Corporate Image, Positive Word of Mouth, Retained Customers, Market Share, Growth, Improved Revenue & Sales, and Organizational Effectiveness.

On the contrary, when there is a set of individuals or employees who are inconsistent with the Cultural Intelligence aspect, they provide an input which is not an extra effort to understand the cultural needs and expectations of their customers. They are able to satisfy only their basic, general and regular needs. In such a case when a cross cultural service encounter takes place, it produces a negative customer-related outcome which is Customer Dissatisfaction, Unhappy Customers, Negative Word of Mouth, Complaints, Propensity to switch, Service failure. The impact being produced is the organizational disadvantage being produced in the form of Losses, more management time spent on grievances, Negative Word of Mouth, Declined Corporate Image. Thus, it is of immense significance to understand that there does exist a difference between employees serving in the hospitality sector who are culturally intelligent and those who are not.

Figure 1: An Assessment of the impact of Cultural Intelligence on Service Encounters in the International Hospitality industry.



Source: Developed by Pallvi Arora

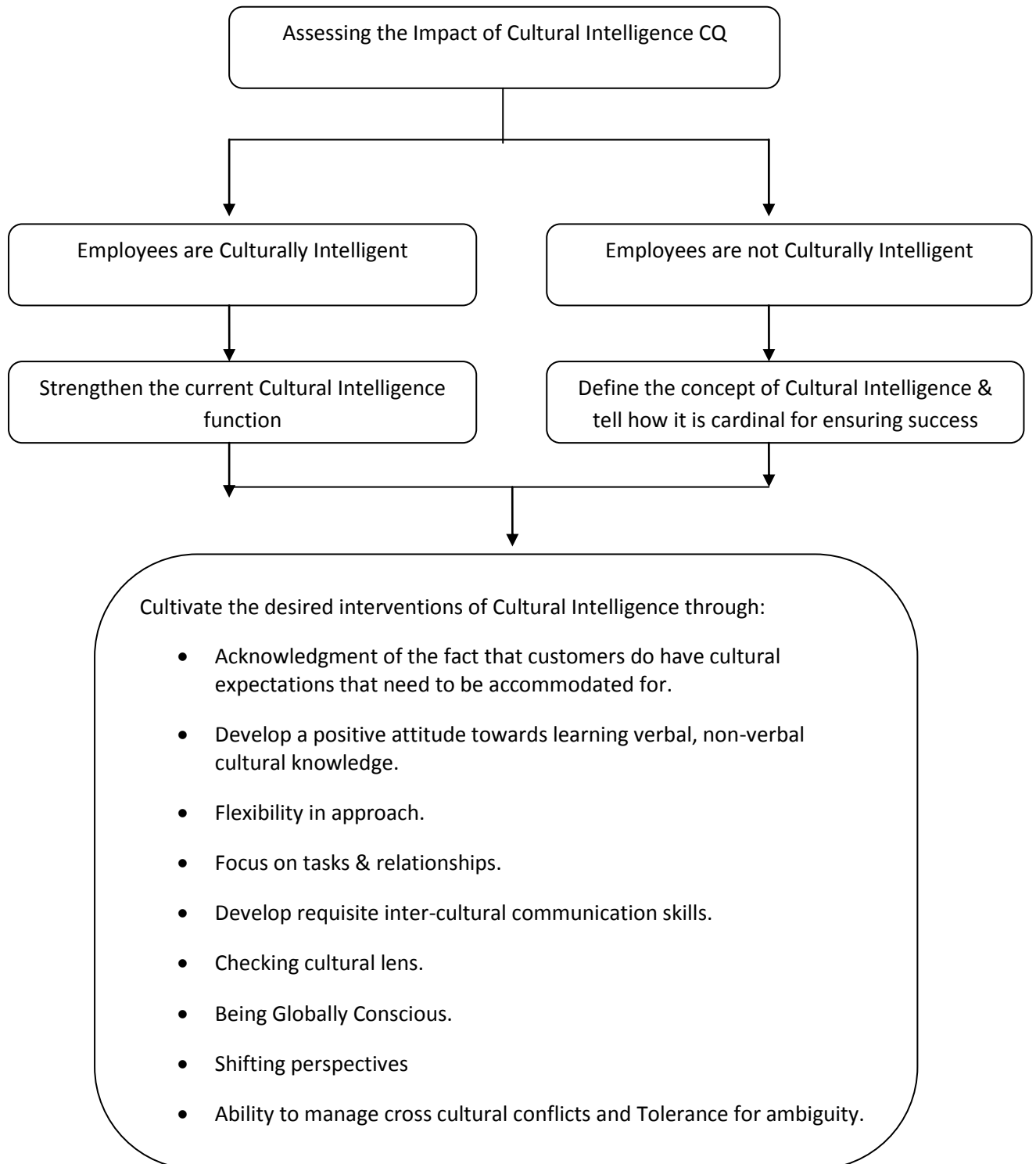
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Further, Fig. 2 describes a framework for identification of variation in Culturally Intelligent employees and employees who are not culturally intelligent for development of skills in the International Hospitality Industry. This framework enables to understand how employees in the international hospitality industry must develop their skills in order to meet the cultural needs of their customers.

The given framework suggests that employees who are already culturally intelligent and are capable to actively fulfill the customer expectations, must strengthen their Cultural Intelligence function which already exists in them. Conversely, if employees are not culturally intelligent, they need to be explained the importance of Cultural Intelligence in the International Hospitality industry and what role it can play in ensuring success in the respectively.

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Figure 2: A Framework for identification of variation in Culturally Intelligent Employees and Employees who are not culturally intelligent for development of skills in the International Hospitality Industry.



Source: Developed by Pallvi Arora

But, what is more important is to state that even if employees are culturally intelligent or not, they need to cultivate the desired aspects to enhance their skills through:

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- Acknowledgment of the fact that customers do have cultural expectations that need to be accommodated for.
- Develop a positive attitude towards learning verbal, non-verbal cultural knowledge.
- Flexibility in approach.
- Focus on tasks & relationships.
- Develop requisite inter-cultural communication skills.
- Checking cultural lens.
- Being Globally Conscious:
- Shifting perspectives
- Ability to manage cross cultural conflicts and Tolerance for ambiguity.

All the above stated interventions are essential as they are based on the fact that individuals across cultures vary in their perceptions, thinking, assumptions and expectations in the international hospitality sector. It is eminent to understand and look at the world with multiple perspectives in order to identify how advantages can be extracted from diversity. It states that it is important to exchange ideas and feelings and give meaning to the cross cultural interactions in order to achieve success.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The growth in the service industry globally has led to increased cross cultural dealing. As managers have become more and more exposed to diversity in all respects, as competition has increased in the hospitality industry, as the cultural expectations and demands have increased, as the customers and travelers have become more knowledgeable about the environment; it creates challenges which needs to be addressed in order to be beneficial.

Thus, the following issues can be identified in the context of the international hospitality industry and the role that Cultural Intelligence can play to bring to achieve the goals:

- Openness to cross cultural sensitivity: Managers in the international hospitality industry need to continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge in order to acknowledge the differences that arise on account of cultural diversity. When managers are open to cross cultural sensitive issues (verbal and non-verbal), their performance enhances, as they become closer to meeting the cultural expectations of their customers and gaining a competitive edge towards their competitors.
- Flexibility in approach: It is of paramount importance for the service provider to be well acquainted with the core cultural values of their customers, suppliers and employees in order to make their service more customized. The capability of the service provider to adjust themselves to the cultural requirements of their customers enables them to provide better service and happy customers.
- Embracing diversity: It is very important for the service provider to acknowledge diversity as in service organizations it is inevitable to come across people belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds and establish cordial

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relationships with them as they help generate revenue and profits for the organization.

- Handling complaints: People associated with the international hospitality industry shall be trained appropriately in order to handle the complaints of their customers. Customers belonging to different nationalities possess different forms of greeting, liking for different type of meals or drinks, accommodation and ways of complaining. For instance, the British tend not to complain but prefer not to return. Thus, it becomes essential on part of the service provider to identify these diminutive cultural requirements in order to handle the complaints of their customers appropriately.
- Service recovery in case of a service failure: In case of a service failure, it becomes the responsibility of the service providers to find out the cause of the service failure. Identifying the reasons for the service failure shall enable the service provider to evaluate the cultural barriers that came in between. Also, cross-cultural service failures are sometimes easier to recover as it is assumed that such a failure might have occurred due to confusion occurred due to cultural differences. But sooner the service provider is able to understand and leverage cultural differences; the better it will be for them to make their customers satisfied.

It can indeed be concluded that culture has an impact upon the intercultural interactions. Managers, who are a part of the international hospitality industry, cannot achieve their goals unless they are open and sensitive to the cultures of their customers, employees and suppliers. Thus, the managers need to be culturally intelligent and Cultural Intelligence (CQ) shall provide an insight and provide a streamline to the managers in order to help achieve their corporate goals.

8. Limitations & Future Research Directions

The primary limitation encountered during the conduct of the study was the dearth of literature. As Cultural Intelligence is comparatively a newer area of research, presently a very large volume of literature is not available.

As research here is done at a micro level, it sets the pace for future probing in the area. It is also recommended to further engage research projects in order to contribute to literature in the context, in order to study the impact of culture on the intercultural interactions in the hospitality industry and other service organizations and identify the role of Cultural Intelligence in gaining a competitive advantage.

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