



12th International Strategic Management Conference, ISMC 2016, 28-30 October 2016, Antalya, Turkey

## Relationships between personality traits, cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence

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### Abstract

Cultural intelligence has been subject to so many studies in literature. Besides cultural intelligence, intercultural communication competence is emphasized in literature. Relationship between cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence is presented in literature. Personality traits are very changeable as individuals have different personality traits. This difference influence cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence. Our study focuses on the relationship between personality traits, cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence. The study is conducted on 4 senior employees of two firms operating in automotive industry in Turkey. To examine the relations, interviews was done with 3 senior employees working in German origin firm and 1 senior employee working in South Korean origin firm. The obtained data from the interviews are evaluated through the depth examination. Findings revealed that cultural intelligence has positively influence on intercultural communication competence and also personality traits on the cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence. Also it is supposed that effect of personality traits decrease on intercultural communication competence when cultural intelligence is clearly considered.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of ISMC 2016.

*Keywords:* Personality traits, Cultural intelligence, Intercultural communication competence

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### 1. Introduction

In the modern business world, employees are one of the most valuable resources for companies. Companies always create strategies to have competition advantage. Companies utility from their employees' ideas during creating strategies. Managing employees who have various cultures is critical to support strategies of companies. Because employees expect from each other to understand their cultural values and attributes. Understanding of expectations exactly satisfy them. When employees satisfy at workplace, they can support mission, vision and strategies of

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companies. So managing cultural diversity and understanding personality traits influencing intercultural communication are crucial to successfully execute strategic decisions.

There are employees who have different attributes and various capabilities in companies. Personality traits of these employees are different from each other and this difference influences thoughts and behaviors of employees. In global world, companies correspondingly include employees who have various cultures. Understanding employees who have various cultures is crucial for companies. Employees who internalize cultural differences and show tolerance towards these differences have an important capability. Companies wish to hold these capable employees.

As personality traits of employees are different from each other, perspective of employees to cultural differences varies prominently. Comprehending of a various culture can vary according to personality traits. Some employees do not accommodate to individuals who have a diverse culture, but conversely some employees quickly accommodate to same culture. Hence personality traits of employees are a considerable factor to understand different cultures. Likewise when communicated with individuals who have diverse cultures, personality traits of employees influence quality of communication. While more extrovert individuals easily communicate with someone who has an unfamiliar culture, introvert individuals extremely suffer for communication.

It is needed to manage cultural diversities to communicate with individuals having various cultures. It requires to have information about norms, traditions and practices of foreign cultures. In this study, firstly personality traits are handled. Afterwards cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence are explained respectively. Studies that focus relations between these three concepts are referred to provide theoretically background. Lastly findings and conclusion are shared clearly.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Personality Traits*

Personality is a topic which is often handled by researchers. As each individual has a complicated personality, it is difficult to absolutely understand individuals. Attributes of individuals help to understand them. At this point, personality become an important factor because it has different attributes. Physical attributes of individuals and also their thoughts, emotions, behaviors, habits, demands and attitudes differ substantially (Günel, 2010).

Personality has a role on determining emotional, behavioral and cognitive forms of individuals. (Mount et al., 2005). Diversities of individuals can be explained by personality. As mentioned above, behavior of each individual differs substantially. Diversities of performed behaviors are related to values and beliefs of individuals. Values and beliefs of individuals are result of their personality (Dweck and Leggett, 1988).

Some models were presented to examine personality. In this research, Big Five Personality Model which is extensively used by another researchers was handled to measure personality traits. According to Big Five Personality Model, personality traits have five dimensions. These dimensions are extroversion, openness to experience, neuroticism, compatibility and responsibility. (Costa and McCrae, 1995). Extroversion includes talkativeness and initiative behaviors by contrast with calmness, shyness and passiveness behaviors. According to this, extroversion requires substantially energetic, active and dynamic actions (Goldberg, 1993). Openness to experience articulates that individuals become creative and sensible to art, These individuals behave more flexible and respect to values of other individuals. Also these individuals have more different thought structure (McCrae and Sutin, 2009). Neuroticism means appealing emotions that reason stress. It has attributes related to these emotions (Bitlisli et al., 2013). Compability articulates that individuals consider others and also behave sympathetic towards others (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003). Responsibility articulates that individuals work more organized and planned. These individuals work as more determined (Barrick et al., 1993).

### *2.2. Cultural Intelligence*

Cultural intelligence means that individuals can effectively manage cultural diversity. Individuals who manage the cultural diversity have cultural intelligence capability (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008). Cultural intelligence requires

diversities of individuals and adaptation of individuals to unfamiliar cultural environment (Deng and Gibson, 2008). Cultural intelligence requires to understand individuals having different culture. Also information accumulation is needed to coordinate with individuals. Accordingly adaptation capability of individuals who have cultural intelligence is very high (Yeşil, 2009).

Cultural intelligence has four dimensions. These dimensions are metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral intelligence (Ang et al., 2007). Metacognitive intelligence articulates getting of cultural information to understand different cultural factors and solving problems related to cultural factors. Also metacognitive intelligence emphasizes thought process creating capability of individuals (Van Dyne et al., 2010). Motivational intelligence is related to attention and energy that individuals show for adapting to unfamiliar cultures. Individuals' desire to solve cultural problems in workplace reveals motivational intelligence (Van Dyne et al., 2010). Cognitive intelligence reflects norms, traditions and practices shaping at various cultures. It includes social structures of different cultures and knowledge of cultural values (İşçi et al., 2013). Behavioral intelligence means capability that is needed to be social in an environment that includes various cultures. It needs compatibility and flexibility for verbal and nonverbal behavior types.

### *2.3. Intercultural Communication Competence*

Intercultural communication means communication between members of different cultures and sub-cultures. Intercultural communication includes interacting of individuals having different cultures, sending messages to each other and meaning these messages (Özdemir, 2011). When individuals who communicate in unfamiliar cultural environment do not know others' communication behavior, they give meaning others' attitude and behavior according to their cultural norms. This situation causes communication conflicts between individuals having different cultures (Selçuk, 2005).

Intercultural communication competence means understanding competence of attitudes and behaviors of individuals having unfamiliar cultures. Intercultural communication competence focuses on communication process and perception role of communication. Solving of messages depends on cultural values of individuals who take the messages. Solving of messages is able to show variability according to cultural values (Beamer, 1992).

### *2.4. Development of Propositions*

It is pointed out that personality traits addition to gender, social - economic class, religion, race and physical appearance are examined within cultural differences. Communication among individuals is an important factor for intercultural communication. To carry out intercultural communication, each individual needs to perceive another individuals. Individuals need to give feedback to each other. Accordingly personality traits of individuals crucially contribute to carry out intercultural communication (Bennett, 1998). Some personality traits are distinguished from others to provide effectively intercultural communication. Extrovert, open and compatible individuals tend more to intercultural communication. According to a study which was practiced in Malaysia, extrovert, open and compatible individuals create more the intercultural communication (Ramalu et al., 2010).

*P1: Personality traits have positively effect on intercultural communication competence.*

There are studies that examine relation between personality traits and cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2006; Duff et al., 2012; Şahin., 2014). Personality traits contribute to each dimensions of cultural intelligence. Personality traits have influence on cultural intelligence by different ways. Ang et al., (2006) explored that open individuals exactly reflect the cultural intelligence. Responsible individuals have more information about cultures, norms and values of another individuals. Compatible and not neurotic individuals tend to establish social relations. These individuals show compatibility to verbal and nonverbal behavior style of another individuals. Addition to this extrovert individuals again tend to cultural intelligence by showing essential energy and synergy towards others. Duff et al., (2012) found that open individuals clearly tend to cultural intelligence.

*P2: Personality traits have positively effect on cultural intelligence.*

Cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence are concepts related to each other. There is close relation among these two concepts. Cultural intelligence is to get information about behavior and thought style of individuals having unfamiliar cultures. Getting the information helps individuals to communicate with each other as verbal and un verbal. Cultural intelligence prompt the individuals to communicate with others having unfamiliar cultures. Also it contributes for preferring more suitable behavior style (Bücker et al., 2014).

*P3: Cultural intelligence have positively effect on intercultural communication competence.*

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Research Goal*

In this research we aim to identify relationship between personality traits, cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence. It is supposed that personality traits have effect on cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence. Also it is supposed that cultural intelligence has effect on intercultural communication competence positively. To confirm these relations, interviews was conducted at two companies that have different origins.

#### *3.2. Research Design*

Interview methods were used in accordance with goal of research. The interviews were carried out at two companies that have foreign managers. The companies operate their activity at automotive industry. They have a corporate structure. The interviews was had with 4 senior employees. One of employees works at South Korean origin company. Other three employees work at German origin company. German origin company is one of the biggest foreign capital investors at Turkey. It has totally 5.454 employees. South Korean origin company has totally 3.450 employees at Turkey.

While selecting the senior employees it was considered that employees often meet with their foreign directors at workplace. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from employees. After literature related to cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence was examined, eleven questions were prepared for asking to managers. These questions also were evaluated by an academician to make sure construct validity. Following the opinion of expert, total eleven questions were prepared. Some questions are following:

- 1) Do you have information about culture of your foreign directors?
- 2) Is it looked to events and situations from foreign directors' perspective?
- 3) How do you communicate with directors?
- 4) Are your personality traits an important factor to communicate with directors?

In addition to questions, it was requested from employees to give some examples reflecting cultural intelligence and cultural communication competence. Also it was observed communication style and behaviors of employees at workplace. Furthermore it was allowed to employees to give additional information without influencing them.

#### *3.3. Findings*

Interviews were recorded to not miss any valuable information. Data gathered from interviews was deeply analyzed. After depth analysis was made, results were tried to support with literature.

The first result is that personality traits of employees and directors have influence to communication. Employee who works at German origin company, says "Director of our department is substantially compatible. Also I am compatible. So we can agree with each other. But my some co-workers are incompatible. So they sometimes have conflicts like clash of ideas." Also it is comprehended that employees who are relax at workplace become closer to directors than employees that are more serious.

It was presented that company's employees have information about cultures of foreign directors. They also accommodate to their cultures with time. An employee who works at South Korean origin company, says "An South Korean director walks around by slipper at workplace. When I firstly see this, I was really surprised. In the beginning I was finding it strange but then I adjusted myself to this behavior. Two cultures merge to each other with time". An employee who works at German origin company, says "We eat lunch at average twenty minutes and quickly begin to work. German directors use their lunch time to the last and then they begin to work at appropriate time. They do not any miss working time. They are very normative." When these explanations are considered, it is concluded that employees create their cultural information about unfamiliar cultures. Creating cultural information helps to employees to understand communication behavior of foreign directors. It is clear that cultural information is a factor influencing the intercultural communication competence. Although there are employees who have different personality traits at workplace, when they develop their cultural information about directors they easily communicate with directors without paying attention to personality traits.

A result emerged from interviews is that employees look at events and situations according to perspective of foreign directors. But this capability improves slowly. When employees spend time more at workplace, they can understand expectations and perspective of foreign directors. An employee who works at South Korean origin company, says "We are relax at workplace and outside. I want to spend time with my friends but Korean directors demand from me to work more. Because they like so much working. Surely I began to not spend much time with my friends. We slowly become South Korean." An employee who works at German origin company, says "German directors do not prefer graphic and figure at presentations. Only several sentences and conclusion are enough for them. But we are enthusiastic to use graphic and figure at presentations. We like visuality. Later a few months, short and clear presentations become fashionable." One of them says "I was ill but I came to working. When a director saw me, he asked why I came to working. Later one hour I learned that he has not worked at last day as he had a cough." Looking from perspective of foreign directors guides to employees to sense emotions and thoughts of foreign directors.

In the decision making processes, conflicts that arise from cultural diversities sometimes occur between employees and foreign directors. But as a result of harmony of individuals, these conflicts decrease at workplace. Written communication is an important tool to overcome conflicts. Written communication is a common tool at overall departments of two companies. Communication conflicts at formal work processes are decreased by written communication. One of employees who works at South Korean origin company, says "The biggest problem is language to communicate with directors. Because they locally think but speak as English. They give importance to a lot of figures and images in South Korean alphabet. So we often use written communication to overcome language problems." An activity way like written communication helps to decrease problems at intercultural communication. This way is a resource of motivation to ensure intercultural communication. Written communication may decrease effect of personality traits on intercultural communication competence. Because relations among employees become rational by written communication.

Employees who work at two companies constrict their behaviors to accommodate cultures of directors. Employee who works at German origin company, says "When a director from Germany comes to here, I service coffee to him. But when I go to company which is located at Germany, he does not service coffee to me. I make coffee at his office. Later a few months, when he came to again, I did not service coffee to him because I changed my behavior. This is absolutely cultural difference." Another result is that there is a collective relation between employees and directors. But this relation generally occurs while working at company. Collective relation is related to work. Collective relation does not occur at social environment. Social events are not arranged to create synergy between employees and directors. Employee who works at German origin company, says "German directors do not see workplace as a fun environment. They singly go to lunch. None of directors are not friend with us at social media."

#### **4. Conclusion**

This investigation, which is implemented on South Korean and German automotive firms in Turkey, highlighted to relationship among the personality traits, cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence. Expected result is that cultural intelligence has positively influence on intercultural communication competence. Individuals who have cultural intelligence adopt behaviors, emotions and thoughts of another individuals having various cultures.

This finding is consistent with the literature on relation between cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence (Bücker et al., 2014). It is appeared that meta-cognitive, motivational, cognitive and behavioral intelligence have positively influence on intercultural communication competence. Another result is that personality traits have influence on cultural intelligence and intercultural communication competence.

Cultural intelligence is a critical capability to provide efficiently intercultural communication. When cultural intelligence is clearly considered, influence of personality traits might been ignored for understanding attitude and behavior of individuals having various cultures. Despite of personality traits, effort and desire of individuals for adapting to foreign cultures manifest their intercultural communication competence. When cultural information that is essential to reveal cultural intelligence increase, initially performed behaviors arose personality traits are not been acted because of perception change.

However, this investigation is implemented on South Korean and German automotive firms in Turkey; findings might not be transferable to all organizations having various cultures. Different results can emerge in organizations that have managers and employees having various cultures.

It is recommended to research for future survey whether mediator effect of cultural intelligence on relation between personality traits and intercultural communication competence as cultural intelligence is more critical for intercultural communication competence than personality traits. In this way triangulation can be applied by qualitative and quantitative methods.

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