



# Cultural Intelligence in International B2B Negotiations: An Exploratory Study on the Role of Intercultural Competencies

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## Article History:

Received: 26-04-2025  
Revision: 23-06-2025  
Accepted: 26-06-2025  
Publication: 29-07-2025

## Cite this article as:

Skhiri, S., Zaiem, I., Sobaih, A. E., & Edrees, H. (2025). Cultural Intelligence in International B2B Negotiations: An Exploratory Study on the Role of Intercultural Competencies. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 25(3), 36–48.  
[doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v25i3.1162](https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v25i3.1162)

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to explore the role of cultural intelligence in international business-to-business (B2B) negotiations involving culturally diverse dyads. While intercultural competencies have been widely studied, the specific contribution of cultural intelligence, viewed both as a form of intelligence and a practical competence, remains underexplored in negotiation contexts. This study addresses this gap by investigating how cultural intelligence is understood and applied by experienced negotiators in intercultural settings. A qualitative research design was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with twenty international negotiation professionals from a range of nationalities and industries. Data were analyzed through a directed thematic content analysis, combining deductive and inductive approaches to identify recurring patterns and dimensions of cultural intelligence within negotiation practices. The findings reveal that cultural intelligence is composed of three core dimensions, metacognitive, cognitive, and behavioural, which together enhance the negotiator's ability to adapt, communicate effectively, and build trust in culturally diverse contexts. Respondents emphasized the importance of open-mindedness, contextual knowledge, and flexible communication strategies as key components of successful negotiation outcomes. The study concludes that cultural intelligence is a critical competence for achieving effective and mutually beneficial outcomes in international negotiations. It offers practical implications for global business professionals, encouraging them to develop cultural intelligence through targeted training that fosters self-awareness, cultural understanding, and adaptive communication. By doing so, negotiators can better navigate intercultural complexities, avoid stereotyping, and contribute to more sustainable and cooperative business relationships.

**Keywords:** B2B Negotiation, Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Competence, Intercultural Negotiation

## 1. Introduction

The contribution of intercultural skills to the effective management of cultural diversity is widely acknowledged across various domains of management sciences, particularly in areas such as intercultural leadership, expatriation, and the management of multicultural teams. Among these competencies, the ability to harness cultural richness, known as cultural intelligence, has become especially vital for international negotiators operating in multicultural contexts. While cultural differences between negotiators offer valuable opportunities to generate mutual benefits, they also pose significant risks, potentially escalating into conflicts or severe misunderstandings at the negotiation table (Liu, 2015). These differences influence the roles of negotiators, the nature of communication, mutual perceptions, preferences, and the negotiation styles employed (Benetti, Ogliastrì, & Caputo, 2021). A failure to adjust to and understand new cultural environments often results in unsuccessful business negotiations.

Intercultural differences have long been a central challenge in negotiations involving parties from distinct national backgrounds (Imai & Gelfand, 2010), a challenge that has intensified in today's globalized economy and amid complex geopolitical developments. Cultural diversity exerts considerable influence on negotiation mindsets, patterns, and styles, making it essential for negotiators to develop a deep understanding of the cultural contexts in which they operate (Shen, 2023). Prior studies (Adair & Brett, 2005; Groves, Feyerherm, & Gu, 2015; Imai & Gelfand, 2010) have demonstrated that successful cross-cultural negotiation demands more than technical expertise; it requires an appreciation of cultural value systems and behavior patterns. Despite the clear relevance of cultural intelligence (CQ) as a foundational capability in such settings, there remains a surprising lack of empirical research addressing how this capability is developed and applied within negotiation contexts. Understanding why certain negotiations are more effective than others in culturally diverse environments thus continues to be a pressing concern for scholars and practitioners alike.

Given that standard attributional and perceptual frameworks may not apply in cross-cultural interactions, managers must acquire the ability to negotiate effectively across cultures. Hall (1976) argued that engaging with intercultural dynamics requires the abandonment of one's cultural assumptions, a perspective that paved the way for the conceptualization of cultural intelligence, also known as cultural quotient, introduced by Earley (2002). Originally rooted in

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psychology, CQ is defined as the capacity to adapt effectively when interacting with people or navigating situations embedded in unfamiliar cultural contexts (Sternberg, 2021). While it shares characteristics with other forms of intelligence, such as emotional and social intelligence, cultural intelligence is distinct in its specific relevance to managing cultural diversity (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). Notably, it has demonstrated superior predictive power in determining performance outcomes in intercultural settings (Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne, & Annen, 2011). The emphasis of cultural intelligence is not merely on identifying cultural differences, but on understanding how to bridge them. As a result, scholars of intercultural effectiveness have increasingly recognized CQ as a particularly promising competence (Leung, Ang, & Tan, 2014; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013). This growing interest has not only advanced theoretical discussions but has also produced meaningful practical implications.

Despite its originality as both a form of intelligence and a distinct intercultural competence, research on cultural intelligence in the context of international commercial negotiations remains underdeveloped (Imai & Gelfand, 2010). To address this important conceptual gap, the present study explores how cultural intelligence is understood and applied by experienced international negotiators. We conducted a qualitative investigation to gain deeper insight into the significance of CQ from the perspective of practitioners who engage in cross-cultural B2B negotiations. Given the inherently multidimensional nature of this competence, encompassing metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions, its application is particularly relevant in situations where negotiators must overcome cultural barriers and work toward mutually beneficial outcomes. This approach aligns with the framework of integrative or reasoned negotiation, as proposed by Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011), in which collaboration and joint problem-solving are prioritized. Under such circumstances, cultural intelligence becomes a vital tool for removing obstacles, bridging differences, and fostering productive, trust-based exchanges (Imai & Gelfand, 2010).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: the next section presents a comprehensive literature review covering negotiation theory, intercultural skills, and cultural intelligence. This is followed by a detailed account of our qualitative research methodology and findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications, followed by limitations and directions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition Of Cultural Negotiation, Cultural Intelligence, And Cultural Competencies

This study revolves around three central constructs: cultural negotiation, cultural intelligence, and cultural competencies. In this section, each concept is defined before being explored in greater depth. Intercultural negotiation refers to any negotiation that occurs in a context where individuals from different cultures interact, allowing their respective cultural backgrounds to influence both the negotiation process and its outcomes (Dellech & Debabi, 2017). Cultural intelligence (CQ) is defined as “the ability to interact effectively in environments characterized by high cultural complexity. In order to interact effectively in intercultural environments, in particular, certain cognitive, motivational, and behavioural characteristics are necessary” (Andresen & Bergdolt, 2017, p. 185).

Meanwhile, intercultural competencies are conceptualized as a set of personal characteristics that determine an individual’s potential to function effectively in intercultural situations (Ang, Ng, & Rockstuhl, 2020). In essence, cultural competencies encompass the ability to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and require a combination of skills, attitudes, and ethical principles. This research primarily focuses on intercultural skills, which reflect an individual’s awareness and knowledge of different cultures. However, as suggested in the definition above, cultural intelligence extends beyond knowledge and awareness by emphasizing adaptability, behavioral adjustment, and strategic action in intercultural interactions. The following sections examine these variables in greater detail.

### 2.2. Intercultural Negotiation

Negotiation is inherently a complex process, as the involved parties often have divergent goals, priorities, and interests, and may adopt differing communication styles (Engle, Elahee & Tatoglu, 2013). This complexity is heightened in intercultural settings, where negotiators are less likely to share common interpretive frameworks (Morris & Gelfand, 2004), possess similar constructions of the social context (Gelfand & Cai, 2004), use the same communication strategies (Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000), or experience emotions in the same way (Kumar, 2004).

According to Wilbaut (2010), a negotiation is considered intercultural when the parties originate from different cultural backgrounds. In such cases, the negotiation process becomes more intricate due to the additional dimension of cultural diversity (Adler, 1997). This variable significantly shapes how individuals perceive and interpret reality (Engle et al., 2013). Indeed, culture influences the negotiation framework, the behavior of participants, and their interaction patterns, factors that collectively determine both the outcome and the form of agreement (Wilbaut, 2010).

As a result, negotiators in intercultural settings encounter a wide range of psychological and behavioral challenges (Adair & Brett, 2004; Imai & Gelfand, 2010). Within this context, the literature distinguishes between two types of motivation: motivation for cooperation and epistemic motivation. The former refers to a negotiator’s willingness to pursue mutual benefits with the counterpart, as commonly emphasized in integrative negotiations, including the reasoned negotiation model (Fisher et al., 2011). The latter relates to challenges in coordination and communication, often arising from divergent cultural norms and expectations (Imai & Gelfand, 2010).

### 2.3. Intercultural Competencies

Working in international contexts requires navigating environments marked by distinct cultural specificities. In such settings, the display of appropriate intercultural skills becomes fundamentally essential. Although there is a tendency to analyze these skills at the organizational level, research has predominantly focused on the individual level of analysis (Sandberg, 2000). Prior studies have classified intercultural skills into three primary model types.

First, intercultural skills are conceptualized as personality traits (e.g., Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000), which refer to personal characteristics that influence an individual’s typical behaviors in culturally diverse situations (Leung et al., 2014).

Commonly cited traits include open-mindedness (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000), openness to dissimilarity (Lloyd & Hartel, 2010), tolerance of ambiguity, curiosity (Bird, Mendenhall, Stevens, & Oddou, 2010), the quest for adventure (Javidan & Teagarden, 2011), and cultural empathy (Ang, Rockstuhl & Tan, 2015). In this context, Cahya and Semnani (2024) highlight the significance of intercultural communication in international business negotiations, noting that cultural differences can substantially affect communication styles and negotiation outcomes. Their mixed-methods study, based on interviews and surveys with experienced negotiators, shows that those with high levels of cultural intelligence and adaptability are more effective at understanding cultural nuances, adjusting their communication strategies, and fostering trust-based relationships.

Second, intercultural skills can be viewed as attitudinal dispositions, often described as intercultural or global attitudes (e.g., Bennett, 1986). These pertain to how individuals perceive, evaluate, and engage with other cultures and cultural contexts. Attitudes toward cultural diversity may be favorable (tolerance) or unfavorable (ethnocentrism) (Ang et al., 2015). Individuals with high intercultural competence typically demonstrate a non-ethnocentric orientation (Leung et al., 2014), allowing them to appreciate cultural complexity and seek understanding of both the differences and similarities between cultures (Bennett, 2004). Within this framework, cosmopolitanism is also regarded as a key competency (Javidan & Teagarden, 2011).

Third, intercultural skills are framed as capacities or abilities (e.g., Earley & Ang, 2003), focusing on the practical actions individuals take during intercultural interactions. This model emphasizes an operational perspective, assessing what individuals are actually capable of doing in cross-cultural encounters. Several key characteristics are highlighted in the literature, such as linguistic proficiency (Imahori & Lanigan, 1989), communication adaptability (Lloyd & Härtel, 2010; Hall, 1976), social flexibility (Bird et al., 2010), a holistic mindset, and a willingness to learn and collaborate with culturally different individuals. Central to this model is the inclusion of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence, metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral (Earley & Ang, 2003).

According to Leung et al. (2014), models based on personality traits and attitudes are more conducive to intercultural adaptation, whereas models centered on abilities are better suited for problem-solving in intercultural contexts. Mixed models, which integrate more than one dimension, such as traits, attitudes, and abilities, are also increasingly recognized in the literature (e.g., Javidan & Teagarden, 2011). (*Figure 1 in Appendix 1 illustrates the different types of models proposed in the literature*).

## 2.4. Cultural intelligence

Inspired by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983), Earley (2002) introduced cultural intelligence (CQ) as a distinct form of intelligence particularly suited to intercultural contexts. This construct is notable not only as a form of intelligence but also as a recognized intercultural competence in its own right. Since its conceptualization, CQ has garnered increasing scholarly interest across various disciplines within management sciences. Its application to intercultural business negotiations was first explored in depth by Imai and Gelfand (2010), marking a significant development in the literature.

Multiple scholars have proposed definitions of cultural intelligence, yet they converge on a central idea: CQ is not merely the ability to adapt to culturally different others, but more importantly, it is the ability to act effectively in unfamiliar cultural settings. Sternberg, Chowkase, Desmet, Karami, Lu, & Landy (2021), for instance, define cultural intelligence as the capacity to adapt when confronted with interactional challenges involving people or artifacts from cultures different from one's own. In this sense, cultural intelligence emphasizes effectiveness across diverse intercultural contexts. It functions as a managerial tool for navigating cultural diversity and is not limited to any specific cultural background (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). CQ also possesses a practical dimension, grounded in cultural knowledge and decision-making, making it closely related to what has been termed practical intelligence, which differs from general cognitive intelligence (Ang, Ng, & Rockstuhl, 2020; Sternberg et al., 2021).

Moreover, as consistently highlighted in the literature, cultural intelligence is a multidimensional construct (Ahmad & Mehmood, 2025; Ang et al., 2015; Taras, 2020), comprising four core dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural. According to Ang et al. (2015), the metacognitive component refers to an individual's mental capacity to acquire, reflect on, and revise cultural knowledge in real time to support more effective intercultural interactions. The cognitive dimension pertains to one's knowledge of the norms, practices, and conventions of other cultures, allowing individuals to discern both similarities and differences compared to their cultural frameworks (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). The motivational dimension relates to an individual's interest in and drive to engage in intercultural situations, including the willingness to exert effort to function effectively in diverse cultural settings. Lastly, the behavioural dimension concerns the capacity to demonstrate flexibility in verbal and non-verbal communication, thereby enabling the development of culturally appropriate interaction styles (Sharma & Hussain, 2017).

Recent research has reinforced the strategic value of cultural intelligence (CQ) in international negotiation contexts (Ang et al., 2015; Taras, 2020). Rammutla (2025), in a systematic review, positions CQ as a foundational construct for effective cross-border collaboration, highlighting its multidimensional contribution, metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural, in managing the complexities inherent in intercultural negotiation. This work aligns with a broader consensus that emphasizes the necessity of understanding cultural nuances not only to prevent misunderstandings and build trust, but also to enable the formation of strategic alliances and the resolution of cultural tensions that often hinder negotiation effectiveness.

## 3. Methodology

To investigate the sub-themes of cultural intelligence within the context of commercial negotiations, a qualitative study was undertaken. The lack of empirical studies exploring cultural intelligence in intercultural commercial negotiations, coupled with ongoing debates in the literature concerning its conceptual distinction from other intercultural skills, necessitated a more in-depth, exploratory analysis. This justified the adoption of a qualitative, exploratory research design.

The aim of this study was to explore the role of intercultural skills in negotiations involving culturally diverse dyads, as well as to understand how negotiators perceive and apply the construct of cultural intelligence. Specifically, the study sought to identify the intercultural skills that are considered important and effective by negotiators engaged in cross-cultural negotiations; to examine how professional negotiators conceptualize cultural intelligence; to determine which dimensions of

cultural intelligence are seen as most influential in intercultural negotiation contexts; and to assess the significance negotiators attribute to cultural intelligence as a tool for managing cultural diversity in international commercial negotiations.

To achieve these objectives, the study was conducted during the African International Conference on Business Continuity and Resilience, known as "AFRICA ADAPT 2024," held from October 18 to 20, 2024, in Hammamet, Tunisia. The sample comprised twenty professionals, including business leaders, senior executives, and import/export managers, representing a wide range of nationalities: two each from South Africa, Egypt, Tunisia, Italy, France, the United States, Algeria, and Morocco, and one each from the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and the United Arab Emirates. These participants came from various industries such as manufacturing, information technology, logistics, financial services, energy, consumer goods, healthcare, and international trade, and possessed extensive experience in international negotiations. To enhance the robustness of the findings, efforts were made to ensure maximum sample heterogeneity across sectors, gender, age, and professional background. The principle of data saturation, as proposed by Mucchielli (1994), was used to determine the final sample size. After the twentieth interview, no new insights were emerging, indicating that the research objectives had been sufficiently met, and the data collection process was concluded.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method, allowing participants the freedom to articulate their experiences and perspectives while maintaining alignment with the research focus. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their lived experiences in negotiating with foreign partners, providing contextually rich insights. The interview protocol was initially developed through a combination of literature review and intuitive design, and was then reviewed by three experienced negotiation professionals to assess the relevance and clarity of the questions. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were made before finalizing the guide. The interview guide was structured around two thematic axes. The first axis focused on identifying key intercultural skills that enable negotiators to interact effectively with culturally diverse counterparts, thereby situating cultural intelligence within its broader conceptual framework. Respondents were asked questions such as, "In your opinion, what skills are needed to interact effectively with culturally different individuals?" and "What skills are necessary for successful negotiation with a foreign partner?" The second axis addressed the concept of cultural intelligence more directly, exploring practitioners' understanding of the term and the perceived importance of demonstrating cultural intelligence in intercultural negotiations.

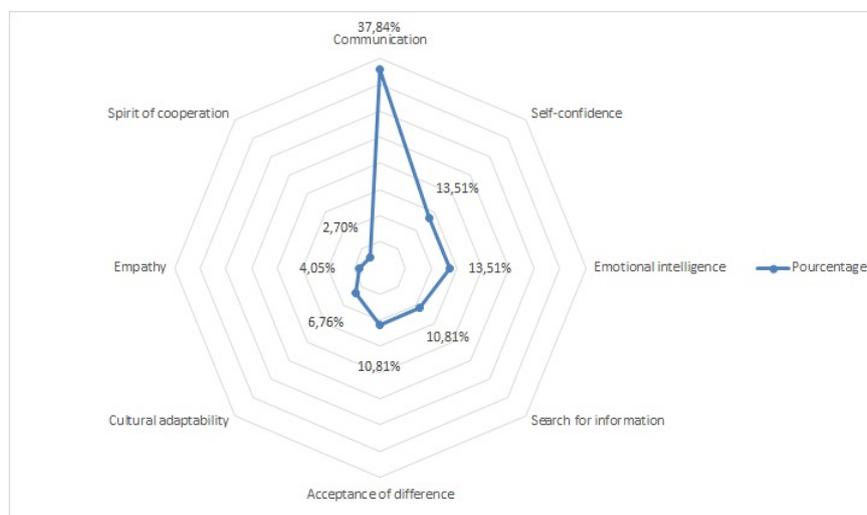
To analyze the data, we employed a directed thematic content analysis using a hybrid deductive-inductive approach (Bardin, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This approach allowed for the systematic integration of predefined themes derived from the literature, namely, intercultural skills and cultural intelligence, while remaining open to the emergence of new insights from the participants' narratives. Data analysis was conducted manually, following the procedures outlined by Weber (1990) and Evrard, Pras, Roux, & Desmet (2009). The process was collaborative, ensuring inter-coder reliability through cross-validation of the codes and themes identified. After transcribing the interviews, data were coded inductively from participants' verbatim responses, grouped into categories, and then organized into sub-themes based on semantic proximity. Frequencies of occurrence were calculated to determine the most prominent sub-themes, which allowed us to highlight the themes most salient to the participants.

The final interpretation of the findings was structured in a summary table to enhance clarity and traceability. Given the exploratory nature of the research, special attention was paid to identifying and distinguishing as many sub-themes as possible, thereby ensuring analytical precision. The findings derived from this process are presented in the following section with more details in Appendices 1 and 2.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Theme 1: Intercultural Competencies

In the first phase of this qualitative study, professionals were asked to identify the interpersonal skills they consider essential for successful intercultural negotiation. Based on the thematic coding of the interviews, eight key competencies emerged: communication, self-confidence, emotional intelligence, information-seeking, acceptance of difference, cultural adaptability, empathy, and a spirit of cooperation. The absolute frequencies of these occurrences were calculated to highlight the most salient skills as perceived by the interviewees (see Figure 1). Further details are presented in Appendix 2.



**Figure 1:** Intercultural skills in negotiation

Communication was consistently identified as the core competency for effective negotiation, a finding that aligns with existing literature emphasizing its central role in intercultural contexts (Cahya & Semnani, 2024). Respondents reiterated that miscommunication resulting from cultural differences frequently leads to misunderstandings and, ultimately, negotiation failure. To overcome these barriers, they reported leveraging multilingual abilities, ensuring message clarity, and integrating both verbal and non-verbal cues. As one respondent expressed: *“You have to master the language, the verbal and the non-verbal, in a very well-balanced way.”* Others emphasized the importance of observation, listening, and facilitating conversation: *“Good observation, listening, knowing how to trigger discussion topics,”* and *“I have to adapt, be careful about what I say, how I do it.”*

Beyond communication, self-confidence and emotional intelligence also emerged as critical themes. Negotiators described self-confidence as instrumental in establishing credibility and building trust. One participant remarked, *“Having confidence in your abilities in front of your partner... when I show him that I have confidence in myself, I will gain his trust.”* Conversely, a lack of self-confidence was associated with diminished performance and increased vulnerability to negotiation failure. Emotional intelligence was also frequently cited as a vital skill. Respondents emphasized the need for emotional regulation and composure, as reflected in statements such as, *“It is essential to know how to control yourself and have emotional intelligence,”* and *“You need composure, patience...”*

In addition, accepting cultural differences and gathering contextual information about negotiation partners were viewed as essential practices. As one professional advised, *“Be tolerant and accept others,”* adding, *“In addition, you need knowledge of the context of each country, an understanding of the cultural and political aspects.”* Such awareness enables negotiators to position themselves more strategically and to anticipate their counterparts' expectations.

Cultural adaptability was also strongly emphasized as vital for success in unfamiliar cultural environments. Respondents discussed the importance of adjusting to new contexts and avoiding cultural missteps. One negotiator explained, *“If there is a contradiction between the cultures of the two parties, each must adapt to the culture of the other... make sure you don't make any mistakes.”* Another added, *“Having the ability to adapt to an environment different from my own is key.”*

Empathy was likewise considered essential, particularly in recognizing and responding to the emotional and psychological dimensions of negotiation. Participants stressed the importance of listening with sensitivity and seeing issues from the other party's perspective. This was reflected in comments such as, *“Empathy is essential to understanding each other,”* *“You have to position yourself on the other side to see things more clearly,”* and *“It is a form of connected knowing.”* Negotiators agreed that this humanistic capacity fosters relationships rooted in mutual recognition rather than dominance.

Lastly, although mentioned less frequently, the importance of a cooperative mindset was not absent from the discourse. A minority of participants explicitly highlighted cooperation as a strategic necessity. One participant stated, *“You have to be willing to cooperate to move things forward.”* According to these respondents, cooperation, balanced with a competitive edge, is crucial to achieving mutually beneficial outcomes, consistent with prior findings (Folberg, Golann, Stipanowich, Kloppenberg's, 2010). A summary table in Appendix 1 illustrates all of the findings mentioned above.

#### 4.2. Theme 2: Cultural Intelligence

As a relatively new form of intelligence, this second theme enabled us to verify the negotiators' understanding of the construct of cultural intelligence, as well as the importance they attribute to this skill in negotiations. Table 1 summarizes the findings with further details in Appendix 2.

**Table 1:** Meaning and importance of cultural intelligence

	Categories	Sub-themes	Repetitions of occurrence	%
Meaning of cultural intelligence	Open-mindedness	Acceptance of difference	20	40.82%
	Acceptance of others			
	Avoidance of prejudices and stereotypes			
	Language proficiency	Adaptation of communication	11	22.45%
	Mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication			
	Flexibility	Adaptability	10	20.4%
	Adjustment			
Importance of cultural intelligence in negotiation	Knowledge of the foreign environment	Collection of information	8	16.33%
	Knowledge of the other			
	Successful negotiations	performance of negotiations	10	66.67%
	Efficiency of exchanges			
	Finalization of negotiations	Achievement of objectives	5	33.33%

Source: developed by authors based on interviews' findings

The findings revealed that, according to professionals, cultural intelligence refers to the ability to adapt to a different cultural context for the benefit of a better interaction. One respondent stated, *“It promotes the ability to adapt and enables one to understand the mentality of the other, particularly when the customs, traditions, and societal codes are fundamentally different.”* Other respondents affirmed this view, emphasizing that cultural intelligence represents an adaptive capacity that facilitates better management of discussions: *“It is a certain ability to adapt that allows one to better manage discussions. It is the ability to adjust to an environment different from my own.”*

More specifically, according to the professionals interviewed, cultural intelligence consists first of accepting difference, expressed through open-mindedness, empathy, and the avoidance of prejudice and stereotypes. One negotiator observed, *“In the context of intercultural negotiations, it is obvious that the profiles are very heterogeneous. To respond appropriately, you must first accept the other, have the ability to step back, and analyze.”* Another participant confirmed this sentiment:

*“Negotiations are conducted with human beings who have feelings and a very particular state of mind that must be acknowledged in order to achieve the objectives of the negotiation.”*

Second, cultural intelligence entails acquiring knowledge about the negotiation partner, including familiarity with the cultural characteristics of their country of origin. As one professional explained, *“It is about being well-informed and having sufficient knowledge about the partner, their country of origin, their culture, etc.”*

Finally, cultural intelligence, according to negotiation professionals, also involves demonstrating behavioral flexibility and adapting one’s communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Several respondents emphasized the importance of language and non-verbal nuance. One participant remarked, *“Cultural intelligence means having a clear command of the language. You must know how to balance verbal and non-verbal communication, know how to express yourself, and remain flexible to ensure that negotiations proceed smoothly. Language proficiency is essential to interact properly with foreign partners.”* Another respondent underscored the importance of message delivery, stating that cultural intelligence also means *“paying attention to what I say”* and *“how to say it.”*

Having explored practitioners’ understanding of the cultural intelligence construct and its dimensions, we proceeded to evaluate its perceived importance in negotiation. The findings show a strong consensus among respondents regarding the critical role of cultural intelligence in culturally diverse contexts. They emphasized that this form of intelligence becomes even more vital in negotiation scenarios. For many, it is seen as a strategic asset essential to the success of intercultural negotiations. One participant stated, *“A very important strategic variable for a successful negotiation. It is very important to have cultural intelligence to succeed in intercultural negotiations.”* Others highlighted its utility in goal attainment, stating, *“It is important because it gives us the power to interact with our culturally different partners to achieve goals. In my opinion, it is a skill that helps achieve goals and make negotiations happen.”*

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this qualitative exploration strongly align with existing literature on intercultural skills. Communication emerged as the most essential competency, consistent with prior research that highlights the importance of language proficiency (Imahori & Lanigan, 1989) and communication adaptability (Lloyd & Härtel, 2010) in intercultural negotiations. These skills are vital for overcoming challenges related to language barriers and differing communication norms (Hall, 1976). Respondents in the present study affirmed the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as the ability to adapt to culturally different partners.

Participants also emphasized the acceptance of cultural differences as a prerequisite for negotiation success. This perspective resonates with earlier contributions by Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000), Lloyd and Härtel (2010), and Bird et al. (2010), who identified traits such as open-mindedness and acceptance of dissimilarity as key components of intercultural competence. Furthermore, the professionals interviewed highlighted the need to acquire knowledge about one’s negotiation partner. This aligns with Bennett’s (1993) argument that understanding both differences and similarities between cultures is critical when engaging in cross-cultural dialogue.

In addition to these well-established themes, respondents identified emotional intelligence and self-confidence as critical for successful intercultural negotiation. While the literature frequently references related concepts such as curiosity (Bird et al., 2010) and the quest for adventure (Javidan & Teagarden, 2011), the prominence given to emotional control and personal assurance in this study underscores their practical value in high-stakes negotiation settings. Empathy, though mentioned, was considered by respondents to be of secondary importance compared to the aforementioned competencies. This nuanced view slightly contrasts with literature that positions empathy as a central element of intercultural competence (Ang et al., 2015). Regarding cultural intelligence (CQ) specifically, our findings are consistent with the literature that emphasizes its operational nature, the ability to act effectively in culturally unfamiliar contexts (Andresen & Bergdolt, 2017; Sternberg et al., 2021). Respondents primarily referenced three dimensions of CQ: metacognitive, cognitive, and behavioural.

The metacognitive dimension, which involves critical awareness and reflective thinking about cultural assumptions and strategies, was frequently cited by participants and regarded as crucial for managing cultural differences. This reinforces previous findings which consider metacognitive CQ one of the strongest predictors of negotiation performance in intercultural contexts (Ang et al., 2015; Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2007; Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012; Engle et al., 2013; Thomas, Elron, Stahl, & Ekelund, 2008). This dimension, when combined with cognitive understanding, appears to support effective behavioral adjustment, as also suggested by Souni (2008).

The behavioural dimension, which concerns the capacity to adapt verbal and non-verbal behavior during intercultural interactions, was also strongly emphasized by respondents. This corresponds with existing literature that regards this adaptability as essential for smooth cross-cultural exchanges (Sharma & Hussain, 2017). Participants highlighted the importance of language use, gesture, tone, and body language in achieving mutual understanding, underlining the practical relevance of this dimension.

The cognitive dimension was also acknowledged, particularly in terms of acquiring knowledge about the cultural background of negotiation partners. Respondents viewed this as foundational; one cannot engage meaningfully in cross-cultural negotiation without understanding the relevant cultural context. This finding is in line with the work of Thomas et al. (2008), Ang and Van Dyne (2008), and Feyerherm & Gu (2015), all of whom argue that cultural knowledge is indispensable for navigating international negotiations.

Interestingly, the motivational dimension of CQ was not explicitly mentioned by the respondents, despite its prominence in the literature (e.g., Ang et al., 2007; Imai & Gelfand, 2010; Salmon, Gelfand, Çelik, Kraus, Wilkenfeld, & Inman, 2013). This omission may be explained by the possibility that professionals perceive motivation as a baseline requirement, an intrinsic quality linked to the personal will and confidence of the negotiator. Consequently, they may view motivation as less malleable or less dependent on external training or organizational initiatives. This interpretation might also explain the stronger emphasis placed on the development of tolerance, cultural awareness, and behavioral adjustment rather than internal motivational drive.

The professionals' views on the importance of cultural intelligence in achieving successful negotiation outcomes are consistent with existing studies, which link CQ to improved performance through cooperative strategies, shared information, and the resolution of cultural tensions (Ang et al., 2015; Chua et al., 2012; Engle et al., 2013; Groves et al., 2015; Guicherd, Dampérat, & Jolibert, 2011; Imai & Gelfand, 2010). Respondents confirmed that CQ enables the management of conflict and the pursuit of integrative negotiation strategies, ultimately contributing to more effective and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Finally, while the merits of cultural intelligence were acknowledged, several professionals also emphasized an ethical dimension that has not been widely discussed in the literature. Specifically, they cautioned that CQ should be applied for cooperative purposes, not manipulation. This insight introduces an underexplored yet important aspect of cultural intelligence, its ethical application, and points toward a potential new avenue for future research.

## 6. Conclusions And Limitations of The Research

This study explored the pivotal role of cultural intelligence in international B2B negotiations and highlighted its practical implications within culturally diverse contexts. The originality of this research lies in its focus on cultural intelligence, a concept still underexplored in the literature on intercultural negotiations, conceptualized through its metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural dimensions. These dimensions are instrumental in ensuring the success of intercultural interactions, as supported by recent findings from researchers at Kalinga University (Jose, J., & Navdeep, 2024). In today's increasingly interconnected global economy, understanding cultural nuances is essential for navigating the complexity of international negotiations.

Our findings, based on insights from experienced negotiation professionals representing diverse cultural backgrounds, indicate that cultural intelligence not only reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings but also fosters trust and facilitates the achievement of mutually beneficial outcomes. The capacity to build strategic alliances and manage cultural tensions is thus critical for the success of international collaborations. Furthermore, during the African International Conference on Business Continuity and Resilience, "AFRICA ADAPT 2024," held from October 18 to 20, 2024, in Hammamet, Tunisia, it was emphasized that developing cultural intelligence is a strategic asset that can significantly contribute to enhancing business continuity. As companies face a wide range of risks and crises, investing in the development of cultural intelligence becomes essential for thriving in multicultural business environments.

These findings converge with the managerial contributions of this study, which call on international companies to give particular attention to cultural intelligence as a core intercultural skill in negotiation. Specifically, organizations are encouraged to incorporate targeted training initiatives aimed at developing the metacognitive, cognitive, and behavioural capacities of negotiators. Practitioners are advised to avoid cultural stereotypes and ethnocentric judgments, acquire in-depth knowledge of their partners' cultural characteristics, and adapt both verbal and non-verbal communication styles. Such approaches will promote mutual understanding and contribute to more effective, inclusive, and results-oriented negotiations.

Despite its significant contributions, this study also presents several limitations. Notably, it does not explore the antecedents of cultural intelligence nor the mechanisms through which this competence develops. Future research should aim to investigate these determinants more deeply, particularly through longitudinal studies that trace the evolution of cultural intelligence over time. Additionally, examining the impact of cultural intelligence on negotiation strategies and outcomes presents a promising avenue for future inquiry. Research at the organizational level is also warranted, as cultural intelligence could potentially enhance organizational resilience and the long-term sustainability of operations. A cross-sectoral comparative analysis would further illuminate contextual specificities, providing a more nuanced understanding of how cultural intelligence functions across industries. Finally, the findings of this study could be strengthened through quantitative validation of the themes identified in the qualitative analysis.

In conclusion, despite these limitations, this research successfully highlights the critical importance of cultural intelligence in fostering effective intercultural negotiations and achieving business objectives. It encourages a sustained commitment to the development of intercultural skills, both at the individual and organizational levels, as a pathway to global business success.

**Acknowledgement Statement:** The authors would like to thank to all participants and the reviewers for providing comments in helping this manuscript to completion.

**Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

**Authors' contribution statements:** Conceptualization, S.S., I.Z., A.E.E.S., and H.N.E.E.; methodology, S.S. and I.Z.; software, S.S., and I.Z.; validation, S.S., I.F., and I.Z.; formal analysis, S.S., and I.Z.; investigation, S.S., I.F., and I.Z.; resources, A.E.E.S.; data curation, S.S., and I.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, S.S., I.Z. A.E.E.S. and H.N.E.E.; writing—review and editing, S.S., I.F., I.Z., and A.E.E.S.; supervision, I.Z.; project administration, A.E.E.S.; funding acquisition, H.N.E.E. and I.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding statements:** This research was funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia, grant number KF250096. Additionally, this research was funded by the General Directorate of Scientific Research & Innovation, Dar Al Uloom University, through the Scientific Publishing Funding Program.

**Data availability statement:** Data is available at request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

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**Appendix 1:** Summary table of the thematic content analysis relating to intercultural skills in negotiation**Table 2:** Intercultural skills in negotiation

Theme	Categories	Sub-themes	Repetitions of occurrence	%
Intercultural skills	Language proficiency	Communication	28	37.84%
	Verbal and non-verbal communication			
	Adaptation of speech and behavior			
	Observation			
	Listen			
	Ability to generate discussion topics			
	Confidence in one's abilities	Self-confidence	10	13.51%
	Insurance	Emotional intelligence	10	13.51%
	Self control			
	Managing emotions			
	Cold blood			
	Patience	Search for information	8	10.81%
	Knowledge of the foreign environment			
	Partner profile identification	Acceptance of difference	8	10.81%
	Adapting to differences			
	Sensitivity to differences			
	Adapting to the culture of others	Adaptability	5	6.76%
Adaptation to a different environment				
Empathy	Empathy	3	4.05%	
Identification with others				
Willingness to cooperate	Spirit of cooperation	2	2.70%	

**Appendix 2:** Excerpts from the verbatim of the interview**Table 3.** Intercultural skills in negotiation

Excerpts of the verbatim relating to the theme of intercultural competence

Sub-themes	Category	Verbatim
Communication	Verbal and non-verbal communication	<i>"You have to master the verbal and non-verbal in a very balanced way". "When I deal with people from another culture I pay attention to my tone and rhythm of voice". "I pay great attention to my gestures and facial expressions so that the other person understands what I want to say".</i>
	Language proficiency	<i>"You have to master the language". "I must be able to express myself clearly, even though it is a different language from my own". "In negotiation, simple and understandable terms must be used, otherwise there is a risk of misunderstanding".</i>
	Adaptation of speech and behavior	<i>"I have to adapt, be careful about what I say, how I do it". "I am obliged to change the way I speak according to my client and its different culture". "I often try to adapt myself to the way others communicate even if it is very different from what I am used to".</i>
	Observation	<i>"It is important to have good observation". "I pay close attention to non-verbal reactions to correct myself if necessary and adjust my speech". "Paying attention to body language is necessary because it gives an idea if the other follows me and understands me or not".</i>
	Listen	<i>"Listening is crucial. It's clear" "I actively listen to assimilate what the other person really mean". "I let them talk, I do not interrupt them, it is important to understand".</i>
	Ability to generate discussion topics	<i>"You need to know how to generate topics for discussion". " I always start by talking about common topics to connect with my partner and facilitate negotiation". "I give time in advance to prepare topics that may be of interest to my interlocutors by taking into account their cultures".</i>

Self-confidence	Confidence in one's abilities	<p><i>"Having confidence in your abilities in front of your partner".</i></p> <p><i>"Je me base sur sur mon expérience pour demeurer toujours confiant dans mes propos et idées pendant la négociation".</i></p> <p><i>"Il faut avoir la confiance nécessaire en sa capacité à confronter des questions culturelles spécifiques".</i></p>
	Insurance	<p><i>"I have to make sure that I stay calm, even when I find difficulties during the exchange".</i></p> <p><i>"It is necessary to know how to show a confident attitude not to show weakness towards the partner of the other culture".</i></p> <p><i>"I always make sure to stay stable inside, this helps me not to be destabilized by a different context".</i></p>
Emotional intelligence	Self control	<p><i>"I try as much as possible not to show my frustrations, even when there is tension".</i></p> <p><i>"You have to be able to control yourself and your reactions so as not to cause misunderstandings".</i></p> <p><i>"I have understood that you must always take a step back before answering, especially when things are not going in the direction I want".</i></p>
	Managing emotions	<p><i>"It is essential to know how to control yourself and have emotional intelligence".</i></p> <p><i>"What I feel when I negotiate, I pay attention to it so that I can adjust my behavior when the case arises".</i></p> <p><i>"I must know how to recognize my emotions and pay attention to them to avoid them interfering in the negotiation".</i></p>
	Patience	<p><i>"I have learned to be patient because I know it takes time to build trust with my customers, my suppliers".</i></p> <p><i>"It is important to understand and accept that the pace of negotiations is not always what we are used to".</i></p> <p><i>"You just have to be patient".</i></p>
	Calm	<p><i>"Coldness, you have to keep it even when the behavior of others surprises me or displeases me".</i></p> <p><i>"Keep your composure at all times so you don't lose control of the situation".</i></p> <p><i>"I've learned to keep a cool head".</i></p>
Acceptance of difference	Adapting to differences	<p><i>"We must be able to adapt by paying attention to all the differences that may exist".</i></p> <p><i>"If we are to succeed in the exchange, we must adjust our behaviour according to the different cultural codes that we face".</i></p> <p><i>"Often, I have to change my way of doing things so that it is more compatible with the other person's culture".</i></p>
	Sensitivity to differences	<p><i>"I respect differences even if sometimes I don't really understand them".</i></p> <p><i>"It is important to be aware of the difference in experience between partners".</i></p> <p><i>"It is very important to be tolerant and accept others".</i></p>
Search for information	Knowledge of the environment stranger	<p><i>"Knowledge of the context of each country, understanding of cultural and political aspects is fundamental".</i></p> <p><i>"I take the time to learn about the rules and customs of my partner's country before engaging in negotiation".</i></p> <p><i>"If we do not understand the local context, we risk misunderstandings".</i></p>
	Identification of the partner profile	<p><i>"I identify the partner's profile and get an idea of the legal framework. It is necessary to know with whom one has to deal in order to adapt the speech and the gestural also accordingly".</i></p> <p><i>"I think it's important to pay attention to the level of hierarchy and the role played by the person opposite before starting the discussion".</i></p>
Cultural adaptability	Adapting to the culture of others	<p><i>"If there is a contradiction between the cultures of the two peoples, each must adapt to the culture of the other, separate and be careful not to make mistakes".</i></p> <p><i>"I have to adapt to the different codes that characterize my partner's culture to facilitate the exchange".</i></p> <p><i>"Even if the way we do things has nothing to do with our habits, we must respect them".</i></p>
	Adaptation to a different environment	<p><i>"Having the ability to adapt to an environment different from my own".</i></p> <p><i>"I mentally prepare myself to step out of my comfort zone and be comfortable in a completely new environmental setting".</i></p>
Empathy	Understanding others	<i>"Empathy is essential to understanding others".</i>
	Identification with others	<i>"I always make the effort to position myself in the place of my interlocutor to better understand his vision and point of view".</i>
Spirit of cooperation	Willingness to cooperate	<p><i>"You have to have the will to cooperate to get things done".</i></p> <p><i>"Wanting to cooperate is essential".</i></p>

**Table 4:** Sense of cultural intelligence

Excerpts of the verbatim relative to the concept of cultural intelligence

Sub-themes	Category	Excerpts of Verbatim
Acceptance of difference	Open-mindedness	<p>“After 10 years of experience, I believe that cultural intelligence can translate into open-mindedness regardless of the negotiation”.</p> <p>“In the context of intercultural negotiations, it is clear that profiles are very heterogeneous. Having the ability to step back, analyze, and master several aspects...”</p> <p>“A negotiator must be open-minded, even when faced with destabilizing cultural differences”.</p>
	Acceptance of the other	<p>“Accepting others without cultural barriers”.</p> <p>“In order to react well, we must begin by accepting the other”. “We must not try to bring others back into our own cultural codes. On the contrary, we must welcome them as they are”.</p>
	Avoidance of prejudices and stereotypes	<p>“It is very important to avoid prejudice and stereotypes”.</p> <p>“Be careful not to judge appearances”.</p> <p>“I avoid labeling people based on their origins”.</p>
Adaptation of communication	Language proficiency	<p>“To interact well with foreign partners, language proficiency is fundamental and essential”.</p> <p>“I must make an effort to express myself in the language of the person I am dealing with”.</p> <p>“Cultural intelligence implies a perfect command of the language”.</p>
	Mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication	<p>“I have to adapt, be careful about what I say, how I do it”.</p> <p>“You have to know how to communicate”.</p> <p>“I think it is very important to adapt the way of speaking and body language according to the culture of the partner”.</p>
	Flexibility	<p>“You have to be flexible”.</p> <p>“Flexibility is needed to ensure smooth negotiations with partners”.</p>
Adaptability	Adjustment	<p>“It’s the ability to adapt to an environment different from my own. I consider this essential for successful negotiation”.</p> <p>“You have to be ready to adjust your habits and behaviors according to the cultural context”.</p> <p>“You have to be able to step out of your comfort zone to understand another culture”.</p>
Collection of information	Knowledge of the foreign environment	<p>“Have sufficient knowledge about the country of origin, the culture”.</p> <p>“It’s about being cultured”</p> <p>“I inform myself in advance about the norms, customs and context of my partner’s country”.</p>
	Awareness on the other	<p>“Have enough knowledge about the partner”.</p> <p>“I value understanding my partner before starting to trade”.</p> <p>“You have to take the time to understand who the other persons are, how they operate and what is important to them”.</p>

**Table 5:** Importance of cultural intelligence in negotiation

Sub-themes	Category	Excerpts of verbatim
Negotiation Performance	Successful negotiations	<p>“A very important strategic variable for a successful negotiation”.</p> <p>“It is very important to have cultural intelligence to be successful in intercultural negotiations”.</p> <p>“This is what makes the difference between a negotiation that fails and another one that succeeds”.</p>
	Efficiency of exchanges	<p>“ It is necessary to develop a cultural intelligence for better exchanges and to be able to converge”.</p> <p>“ Thanks to this intelligence we can better structure the exchange”</p> <p>“ When you have this kind of intelligence, you can have a constructive dialogue even if you have different opinions”.</p>
Achieving objectives	Finalization of negotiations	<p>“This is important because it gives us the power to interact with our culturally diverse partners to achieve our goals”.</p> <p>“In my opinion, it is a skill that allows you to achieve goals and make negotiations a reality”.</p> <p>«When you are culturally intelligent, you can negotiate to the end”.</p>