



# What's Your CQ?

So you know your IQ and you're developing your EQ – but have you honed your CQ? *Buhle Dlamini* reveals how important cultural intelligence (CQ) is in building our nation and workplaces.

**GROWING UP IN** Hlabisa village, in northern KwaZulu-Natal, I was surrounded by people who looked like me, sounded like me and usually behaved like me. In 1994, I moved to Durban and, suddenly, I began interacting with different cultures and races. The following year, a Scottish family from my church opened their home to me when I found myself without a place to stay. However, it wasn't all "*Simunye* – we are one," because on weekends, I would work as a so-called garden boy for money, and while some of my White employees were genuinely compassionate, many were also expert at pulling those patronising smiles reserved for Black people, as well as a few blatant racists who would call me the K-word to my face. Fortunately, I've since been afforded opportunities to be exposed to different cultures in various countries;

in each, I've found a way to fit in by embracing the "otherness" of others. I've slept in a shack in the Eastern Cape and dined with royalty on the banks of Loch Lomond in Scotland. I've had Chinese people touch my skin in the city of Xong Xing, and German teens run their fingers

"CQ picks up where EQ leaves off."

through my hair in a Bavarian town. Today, I'm married to and work with a Canadian woman. Our first child is adopted and from the Congo. Our second child is my youngest brother whom we adopted when my parents passed away, and we have two biological children. We have our very own,

very diverse Dlamini culture, which opens our home and office space to numerous cultures.

However, my culturally inclusive story appears to be the exception in an increasingly fractured South Africa. Given our tarnished history of segregation, we live in a racially charged atmosphere where every engagement across cultural divides is a potential minefield. Add to this mix the legal and undocumented immigrants and you have interactions so volatile that they could explode into violence, as demonstrated by the xenophobic attacks. Then there's the additional catalyst of social networking platforms, that often seethe with racial and cultural hatred, due to the flawed assumption that the sense of anonymity these platforms afford people gives them free rein to be bigots. Prejudice also dogs corporate SA, and as our country embraces

international business ventures, we are often exposed to more personal clashes. Unfortunately, we often lack the cultural intelligence (CQ) to deal with the challenges of today's increasingly multicultural, borderless world. But it is this vital capability that is crucial in determining your growth and development both in the workplace and in our nation.

## Developing Your CQ

It is easy enough to hide our prejudices in social circumstances, but when stress levels and tensions run high – as they inevitably do in the office space – then our hidden beliefs about other races and cultures come to the fore, often resulting in conflict, a high staff turnover and bad business. This is why there has never been a more crucial time to develop our CQ, says David Livermore, PhD, president of the Cultural Intelligence Center in Michigan and author of *The Cultural Intelligence Difference*, who conducted seminars in South Africa last year: "What CQ measures is the capability to function effectively in a variety of national, ethnic and organisational settings," he says. "CQ is similar to IQ and EQ in that it quantifies a set of capabilities believed to be important to both personal and professional success. It's unique in that it focuses specifically on the skills needed for success in unfamiliar cultures. A high CQ enhances your effectiveness working in culturally diverse situations."

As business experts P. Christopher Earley and Elaine Mosakowski write online in a *Harvard Business Review* article, "Cultural intelligence is related to emotional intelligence, but it picks up where EQ leaves off. A person with high emotional intelligence grasps what makes us human and at the same time what makes each of us different from one another. A person with high CQ can somehow tease out of a person's or

group's behaviour the features that would be true of all people and all groups, those peculiar to this person or this group, and those that are neither universal nor idiosyncratic. The vast realm that lies between those two poles is culture."

In South Africa, there has been a big push to increase diversity and representation in our organisations. However, merely creating a Smarties box of personnel isn't quite enough. Research has shown that homogenous groups can outperform diverse teams without CQ, because similar people find it easier to work together. But when you increase the CQ of diverse teams, they outperform the homogenous ones – leveraging their differences yields the best results.

Individuals with high CQ are able to accommodate cultural values in various situations. Understanding differences undercuts assumptions and ensures we don't label someone incompetent or uptight. They're more likely to understand differences in the time-orientation value: Someone from the Event Time orientation may originate from Africa, Brazil, India or the United Arab Emirates: They don't see anything wrong with an appointment starting 15 to 30 minutes later than the scheduled time. Whereas someone from the Clock Time orientation, like China, Australia or the UK might become frustrated by such tardiness. High CQ in this case enables you to not only understand these differences but accommodate them, too.

For an assessment of your own CQ, visit [cq-portal.com](http://cq-portal.com). Enhancing your cultural intelligence – and consequently, helping to build our nation – starts with you. Reach across the divide and engage the other. You'll only be enriched for it. **Q**

*Buhle Dlamini specialises in personal and organisational development. Visit [youngable.com](http://youngable.com)*

## CQ Measure

You can gauge someone's CQ roughly by observing them with these four capabilities in mind:

**1. CQ Drive** (motivation), is a person's interest in and confidence at functioning effectively in culturally diverse settings. Studies have found that without eagerness to take on the challenges of multicultural work, individuals and leaders face a high rate of failure.

**2. CQ Knowledge** (cognition), refers to a person's knowledge of how cultures are similar and different. The point isn't to be an expert on every cultural group but to understand core cultural differences and their effects on everyday business.

**3. CQ Strategy** (meta-cognition), describes how a person makes sense of culturally diverse experiences. This comes into play when making judgments about one's own or others' thought processes. It enables effective planning in the context of cultural differences.

**4. CQ Action** (behaviour), is a person's capability to adapt his or her behaviour to cultures. It requires having a repertoire of responses to suit situations while remaining true to one's self.

