

Cultural and Intuitive Intelligence of SME's Leaders

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Abstract— SMEs' decision makers inescapable face with a number of challenges in pursuing their going international process. For SME's to be considered a success with the continuation of global processes the skills and competencies of the individuals determining the final verdict will ultimately be the decision makers. The following study examines individuals to see whether or not cultural intelligence (CQ) and intuitive intelligence (IUQ) will improve once included in their SME's current international process. In 2015 a survey was issued in Switzerland, of which a total of 75 were returned. The surveys were then sifted through to make sure that they were completed, of all the surveys 53 were finished and eligible to be used for the analysis. Pinpointing the gist of the empirical study it can be shown that the cultural intelligence profile and the decisions made by SME's leaders will end up having a higher – but not significantly higher – level of these leaders' intuitive intelligence (IUC) and a significantly higher level of cultural intelligence (CQ).

Keywords: *cultural intelligence, intuitive intelligence, SME internationalization, decision making, leadership capabilities*

I. INTRODUCTION

The last 25 years were characterized by a worldwide movement of increasing social and cultural interconnection, political interdependence, as well as economic and financial market integration [1]. According to Friedman [2], globalization formed a level playing field which invites and empowers new groups of entrepreneurs. Among those new groups of entrepreneurs are what's known as small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Free trade agreements, increasing competition, and global consumer demands present new opportunities as well as challenges.

In order to capitalize and face those challenges, SMEs run into increased pressures from going global. Unfortunately, SMEs often lack internationalizing facilitating resources or capabilities [3]. According to Paunović and Prebežac [4], local SMEs which are hesitant to internationalize their business will be unable to keep up in the new emerged environment. In SMEs there are usually only few decision-makers, and these leaders often show a lack of knowledge and experience in international markets [5]. Therefore, the internationalization decision making processes for SMEs are often branded by confusion and uncertainty.

Since SMEs' crucial resources and capabilities for the internationalization process are inhibited, they often do not

have another choice other than relying on the intuitive skills of the decision maker [6]. This must not be seen as negative but more or less the opposite. Decision making can be sped up using little more than intuition which can be important in an intricate and changing business environment. Thus, the decision maker's personality, his openness to intuition, intercultural attitude, experiences, and motivation to act across cultural borders play a remarkably important role in terms of internationalization decisions [4]. In other words, the decision maker's cultural intelligence and openness to new ideas makes the difference for a successful SME going international.

This research explores whether or not individuals develop their cultural intelligence (CQ) and intuitive intelligence (IUQ) while involved in the going international process of the SME they're working for. More specifically, an online questionnaire examines respondents' level of CQ and IUQ. The researchers assumed that the level of CQ as well as IUQ is significantly higher for those leaders involved in SMEs' internationalization process. The study clarifies that the cultural intelligence profile and the choices made by SMEs' will end up having a higher – but not significantly higher – level of intuitive intelligence and a significantly higher level of cultural intelligence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The decision maker's role in the internationalization of SMEs

Within an SME decisions are more often than not conducted by either one person or group made up of just a few people; and quite often it's just the owner of the company. Thus, strategic decisions regarding the internationalization of the company are inclined to be the sole responsibility of one SME decision maker [7]. In terms of successfully launching an enterprise into a new market not only does one need to know how to run such an enterprise or have extensive knowledge regarding that business, but having the skills and capabilities of managing cultural and structural differences as well as building up social relationships are imperative [8]. For an SME with the intention of going global, it is, therefore, crucial to find an intercultural suitable decision maker with a certain profile of capabilities; for example, a "culturally intelligent" decision maker. According to Earley and Mosakowski [9, p154], the level of the entrepreneur's cultural intelligence ultimately decides whether a company fails or succeeds in an international environment. The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) has been introduced by Earley and Ang [10] and is defined as "an

individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity" [11, pXV].

So, consequently, the majority of this paper focuses on the CQ level of the decision maker, which is mostly understood as a combination of objective and subjective characteristics, and the decision makers' intuitive intelligence, which is seen as a subjective characteristic. On one hand, the SMEs' success in a foreign market can be largely determined by a managers' ability to accept change and adapt to foreign cultures [12]. On the other hand, decisions made by SMEs' in regards to internationalization can be characterized by the managers' subjective and limited views caused by the absence of measured and logical steps [13]. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the scarce resources that most SMEs have available to them result in choices that cause higher ups too often find themselves relying on managers intuition, characterized by trust, confidence and self- confidence and to follow their decisions [14]. So as the last resort, SMEs' decision makers will have to use their gut feeling or intuition to bridge the terrain of "known" and "unknown".

Schreier et al. [15] explain that a successful SME's decision maker needs self-confidence to consider intuition rationally. They point out that there is no rational decision that can be made without it being accompanied by a (gut) feeling. The rational with the inclusion of intuition as a basis for decision making is the last resort for SME decision makers.

B. Role of Cultural Intelligence for SME internationalization decisions

Within the last decade workforces and internationally focused companies have become increasingly more diverse. As a result, determining why some managers' function more efficiently than others is becoming more and more important [16]. Earley and Ang [10] laid the cornerstone in the relevant research field of cross cultural competence. The CQ construct helps to identify a person's intercultural intelligence and is a critical leadership competency for those with cross-border responsibilities [17].

The following four CQ dimensions show how a cultural intelligent decision maker is recognized:

- **Cognitive Intelligence:** Through educational and personal experiences a cultural intelligent decision maker knows the norms, practices, and conventions of his own culture and the cultures of his business partner [11]. With regards to the decision making process in terms of SME internationalization, an intercultural intelligent SME manager knows the religious beliefs, economic and legal system, norms for social interaction, and aesthetic values, as well as the languages of other cultures [18]. This enables the manager to make effective decisions in intercultural settings based on his knowledge.
- **Metacognitive Intelligence:** Cultural intelligent decision makers recognize and understand different cultural situations [19]. Thereby, SME managers will understand how their own culture influences their behaviour, and furthermore, they are aware that their

own culture affects the way they understand intercultural situations [17]. In terms of the internationalization decision in SMEs, SME managers are aware of the influence of their culture in their decision making style. This allows for managers to keep or change certain aspects of their decisions while allowing them to reflect on their decision making style which in turn will result in completely new decisions that a non-globalized SME would likely not consider.

- **Motivational Intelligence:** Decision makers with cultural intelligence are motivated to engage themselves in intercultural settings. Meaning, they are interested in experiencing other cultures and interacting with people from different cultures [18]. Within the context of internationalization of SMEs, SME managers are capable of directing their energy and attention towards learning about, as well as functioning in, foreign markets [20]. Thus, leaders with high CQ more willingly take the initiative to internationalize their companies.
- **Behavioral Intelligence:** Decision makers with cultural intelligence are capable of demonstrating appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting with persons from different cultures [10]. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors are the most prominent features of social interactions [20]. Internationalizing a company demands high social interactions in an intercultural context. Therefore, culturally intelligent decision makers have higher self-confidence in terms of internationalizing their company.

C. Role of Intuition for SME internationalization decisions

"Today the past is not always what it was thought to be, the future is no longer predictable, and the present is changing as never before" [21, p252]. Thus, nowadays managers have to make major decisions in a climate characterized by rapid change and, at times, marked by crisis events.

Even though the conditions under which managers operate may sometimes limit or even prevent the use of rational analysis, it is nonetheless the norm in many organizational decision making processes. While Stanovich and West [22] assume that one can make better decisions using logic and rational thinking rather than intuition and emotions, other authors, such as Velásquez [23], suggest that intuition and emotion play an important role when making rational decisions. But intuition is often overlooked or disregarded in the decision making process of an organization. Based on earlier studies, Musso and Francioni [24] define rationality as an exact analysis of all existent information to find the best possible alternative decision. Therefore, rationality can only occur if enough information is present. When information is missing or when resources do not allow information procurement, intuition must augment the ratio [25]. The use of intuition in decision-making processes can, therefore, be deemed a last resort in certain situations.

So SME managers should build confidence in their gut feeling and create a learning environment in which intuitive

awareness can be developed [26]. It is important that managers perceive intuition as a positive uncertainty decision strategy, which is ultimately “feeling uncertain about the future and feeling positive about the uncertainty” [21, p255]. Through educational and personal experiences, cultural intelligent decision makers build confidence in their gut feeling and create a learning environment which allows them to reflect and develop their decision making style [26].

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and intuition, the paper compares SME decision makers' CQ as well as openness to intuition who are and who are not involved in the internationalization decisions or involved in the internationalization process of their company. The paper's investigation clarifies SME decision makers' intuitive and cultural intelligence profile and examines if individuals develop their cultural intelligence CQ and openness to intuition while involved in the internationalization process of the SME they're working for. It is assumed that the level of CQ as well as their openness to intuition is higher for those leaders who are involved in successful decisions in SMEs going international.

IV. METHODOLOGY

For this study an online-survey was composed based on the already existing and academic validated 20-item scale to measure CQ: The cultural intelligence scale (CQS), developed by Van Dyne, Ang, and Koh [27]. The theoretical population of interest are SME managers. Out of this population a sample consisting of around 8000 members of the “KMU Swiss Verband” (Swiss SME Union) was drawn. Those KMU Swiss members have been approached by the monthly newsletter of the KMU Swiss Verband. An additional sample consisting of 200 MBA students working for SME was drawn. This additional sample's purpose relevant to the core sample is to compare and validate the results.

To find out the level of participants intuitive intelligence, the online survey offered three different definitions of intuition. Therefore, in the first question, the participants could define intuitive decision making with the three options given by Burke and Miller [28], or write their own definition of intuitive decision making. This procedure guarantees participants and the researchers have the same understanding of intuition in order to appropriately analyzing the data as well as deriving the conclusion. The remaining eight questions aimed to identify the participants' intuitive intelligence. These questions were developed as a semantic differential in order to facilitate the self-evaluation of the participants. The questions were mainly based on the work of Betsch [29], who developed a questionnaire with the aim of identifying the participants' preference for intuition or deliberation (p. 61). To ensure the comprehensibility and appropriateness of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted successfully.

The main aim of this paper was to determine if intuitive intelligence (IUQ) as well as cultural intelligence (CQ) are substantial components of decision makers' characteristics involved in SMEs' decision making processes. A hypothesis is formulated with the regard to the assumption that there is a

difference between groups of persons who are responsible for going international decisions and groups of persons who are not responsible for this kind of decision. More precisely, the hypothesis refers to the assumption that for people who were or are involved in the SME internationalization process, the level of cultural and intuitive intelligence are expected to be higher than those who are or were not involved.

H01: For SME decision makers who are or were involved in the internationalization decision processes of the SME, the levels of CQ and IUQ are the same as for persons who are or were not involved in these processes.

In order to answer the research question and confirm or reject the hypothesis, inferential statistics were used. Furthermore, descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample. Thereby, the statistics software package SPSS was used as a tool. The questions, which lead to those statistical results, were asked through an online-based survey. Therefore, EFS, the online survey tool, was used to create the anonymous survey.

V. FINDINGS

As Table 1 illustrates, out of the 8000 approached SME managers, 16 participated, which results in a ratio of 0.20%. The number of surveys completed by MBA students was more satisfactory. From the former and active MBA students, with 200 potential respondents, 37 MBA students participated, giving a ratio of 18.5%.

Function	Approached	Participated	%
KMU Swiss SME Manager	8000	16	0.20%
SME MBA students	200	37	18.5%
Total	8200	53	0.65%

Table 1: Total number of participants

Interestingly, out of the total of the 16 SME managers (“Swiss KMU Verband”), 11 are also former MBA students the sample is slightly different distributed. This means that only 5 participants are “solely” SME managers and 11 are actually SME managers and (former) MBA students.

A. Involvement in internationalization decisions:

The question deals with the issue of whether the participants were, or are at the moment of the survey, actively involved in the decisions regarding the internationalisation process of the company they are working for. Out of the 53 respondents, 14 (26%) are or were actively involved in the internationalisation process of their company and 39 (74%) are or were not involved. For KMU Swiss Members, 9 of 16 are involved in decisions of internationalization and 7 are not. Whereas for MBA students, only 5 of 37 are responsible for the internationalization process of their company.

B. Level of CQ

Figure 1 illustrates the participants' level of CQ. The y-axis shows the number of respondents, whereas the x-axis shows

the level of CQ. Thus the histogram shows how frequent (how many participants) a certain CQ level has been reached. On average the 53 respondents reached a CQ level of 5.1, with the highest possible level of 7 and the lowest 1.

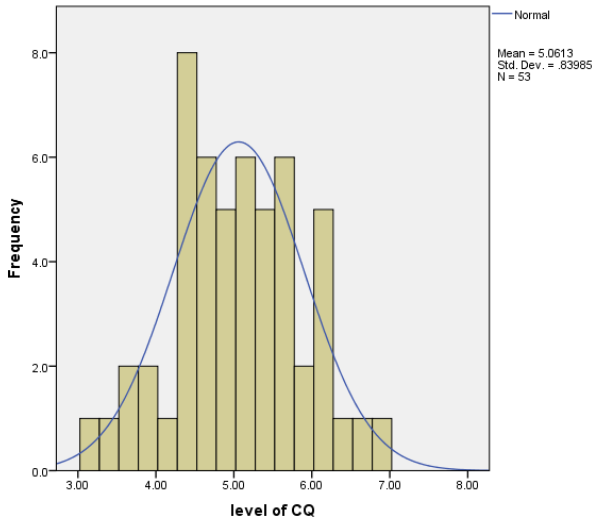


Figure 1: Histogram Level of Cultural Intelligence

In comparing the CQ between KMU managers and MBA students, it turned out that the MBA students yield a CQ mean of 4.90 for the 37 MBA students, whereas the 16 KMU Swiss managers' CQ had a mean of 5.44. Hence, the KMU managers have on average a higher level of CQ.

C. Level of IUQ

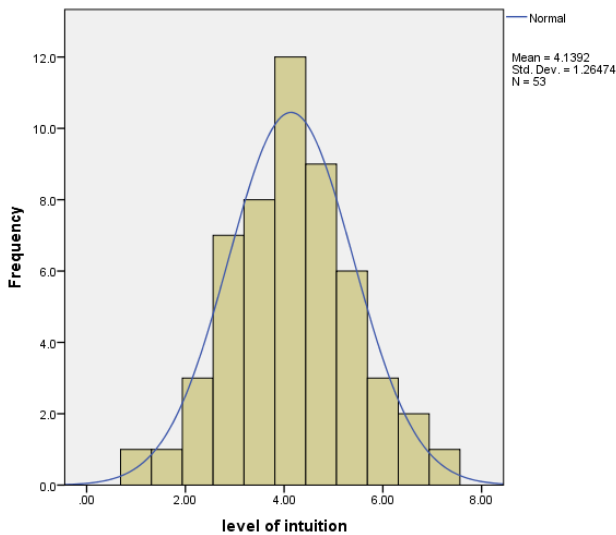


Figure 2: Histogram Level of Intuition

The y-axis of figure 2 shows the number of respondents, whereas the x-axis shows the level of intuition. Moreover, it illustrates that the participants' level of intuition is at an

average of 4.1, which is smaller than their level of CQ. This means that the participants' level of CQ is on average 1 level bigger than their level of intuition (IUQ).

D. Reliability of Intuition Scale

As the CQ scale is scientifically recognized, there was no need to test the reliability of the questionnaire. However, the questions formed to measure intuition were created by the author, thus there was a need to test whether these questions all reliably measure the same latent variable, namely *level of intuition*. The result of the test shows a value of 0.868 (> 0.7 = accepted), which means that the test is reliable. In other words, the eight intuition questions are interrelated to each other and reliably measured the participants' level of intuition.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.868	.876	8

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha

E. Results for the hypothesis

H01: For people who are or were involved in the internationalisation process of the company, the level of CQ, as well as the level of IUQ, are the same as the persons who are or were not involved in the process.

In order to test this hypothesis, a Mann Whitney U-Test was conducted. By comparing table 3 and 4, it becomes apparent that those respondents who are or were involved in the decision making process regarding the internationalisation of their company have, in general, a higher level of CQ (5.61 vs 4.86) and IUQ (4.86 vs 3.95) compared to the ones who are or were not involved in this decision making process.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Level of CQ	14	4.05	6.95	5.6107	.74218
Valid N (listwise)	14				
Level of IUQ	14	2.25	6.75	4.68	1.46736
Valid N (listwise)	14				

Table 3: Mean Comparison – Involved in Internationalisation Process

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Level of CQ Valid N (listwise)	39 39	3.15	6.75	4.8641	.79098
Level of IUQ Valid N (listwise)	39 39	1	7	3.9455	1.14305

Table 4: Mean Comparison – Not Involved in Internationalisation Process

Table 5 yields that the p-value is 0.3% for the level of cultural intelligence and, therefore, lower than the significance level of 5% (p-value: 0.003 < 0.05). Also the table shows that the p-value is 7.3% for the level of intuition and, thus, higher than the significance level of 5% (p-value: 0.073 > 0.05).

	Level of CQ	Level of IUQ
Mann-Whitney U	130.000	184.000
Wilcoxon W	910.000	964.000
Z	-2.886	-1.797
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.072
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.073
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.002	.036
Point Probability	.000	.001

Table 5: Significance – Involved in Internationalisation Process

This means the fourth null-hypothesis cannot be rejected with regards to the level of intuition, but it can be rejected regarding the level of CQ. First, it can be stated that for people who are or were involved in the internationalization process of the company, the level of intuition is not significantly higher than that of the persons who are or were not involved in the process. Second, it can be said that for people who are or were involved in the internationalization process of the company, the level of CQ is significantly different than for persons who are or were not involved in the process. More precisely, the level of CQ and the level of intuition UIQ are higher for those decision makers who are involved in SMEs' internationalization processes than the group of people are not, but it is only significantly higher for the CQ.

VI. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Of all the 53 respondents, 14 (26%) were or have been actively involved in the decision making process concerning the internationalization of their companies, and 39 (74%) have not been involved at all. The hypothesis test concluded that the level of CQ is distinguishably higher for those who are

involved in this process. Since CQ is a person's capability to adjust to different cultural settings [10], settings which exist in the international business context, this result was expected. Since international companies create an environment where members from diverse cultural backgrounds are brought together [10], it is presumed that people who are employed for such a company have a higher level – or develop a higher level – of CQ than people who are not confronted with those settings.

During this research it was possible to show that SME Managers who are involved in an internationalization processes yield a higher level of IUQ but, in difference to CQ, it's not as significantly higher as expected. The outcome concerning intuition might also be explained by means of the theory. Intuition can speed up decision making and is, therefore, frequently used in complex and changing business environments, such as the international market [6]. Nevertheless intuition affects many other factors besides simply making decisions, in regards to the internationalization of a company this intuition also plays a role when choices are being made about subjects such as marketing, human resource development, research and development, public relations, and investments [26]. Therefore, it makes sense that the other group of respondents also developed intuitive skills.

Definite conclusions were a bit tricky to come to since the number of SME managers who participated were not that abundant. Nevertheless, the findings seem worthy of mention: People who are, or were, involved in internationalization decisions have a higher IUQ and a statistically significant higher level of CQ than people who are or were not. Whereas this finding can just be the beginning, future research should take several characteristics of the SME manager into consideration. The authors of this research established that there is in fact a correlation between a decision maker's level of CQ and his or her level of intuitive intelligence, however weak it might be this would be very interesting to see if the effects could be efficiently gauged. But, unfortunately, there weren't enough participants answering the questionnaire for definite conclusions.

Further investigations may be conducted according to the age of the decision makers. Managers in younger generations may adapt faster to international business as they grow up in a more globalized world compared to the older generation. However, the older generation has something that the younger generation does not, experience, this could be a distinguishable factor that gives them an advantage in unknown and rapidly changing environments [30]. Besides investigating further the personality characteristics and traits of SME managers, future research could also take the degrees' of freedom that certain sizes of SMEs are allowed to abide by into consideration. Last, but not least, it could be interesting to focus on the level of education, such as MBA or International Executive MBA programs, which may influence the level of CQ of next generation leaders dealing with globalization.

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