

The Management of Tourism Organizations in the Context of Cultural Intelligence

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Abstract: This study explores the importance of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) in the management of tourism organizations, suggesting that CQ can act as a strategic tool to improve leadership, customer service and human resource management in multicultural environments. Initially, the four dimensions of CQ – metacognitive, cognitive, kinetic/motivational and behavioral – and their relationship to organizational behaviour. Next, CQ's role in leading multicultural teams (enhancing efficiency and cohesion), serving international clients (improving adaptability and satisfaction) and human resource management (supporting training, diversity and staff selection is presented). The article proposes specific practices for the integration of CQ, such as intercultural skills training programs, CQ-based assessment and reward, and the inclusion of CQ in strategic planning. Through the synthesis of real studies and theoretical sources, it emerges that cultural intelligence can be a source of competitive advantage for tourism organizations, enhancing their ability to offer personalized, culturally sensitive experiences. Finally, the paper discusses its theoretical contributions (linking CQ and strategic management in tourism) and proposes directions for future research, concluding that the cultivation of cultural intelligence is a prerequisite for sustainable success in international tourism.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Management, Tourism Organizations, Strategic Management, Customer Service, Human Resource Management, Leadership, Multiculturalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern tourism sector is characterized by strong internationalization and cultural diversity. Tourist destinations welcome millions of visitors from different countries every year – indicatively, in 2019 more than 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals were recorded worldwide (World Tourism Organization, 2019). This interculturality creates a complex environment where tourists, employees and tourism managers interact across linguistic and cultural borders. The ability to understand and adapt to these cultural differences is now a critical success factor for tourism organizations. In this context, the concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has emerged, which refers to the ability of the individual to function effectively in environments with different cultures. Cultural intelligence differs from other forms of intelligence – such as cognitive or emotional – in that it focuses specifically on adapting behavior and thinking in multicultural settings (Yuan et al., 2023). In tourism, where services are provided "from people to people" with different backgrounds, cultural intelligence is emerging as a vital asset for executives and employees. A lack of understanding of cultural particularities can lead to misunderstandings, lower customer satisfaction, and dysfunctions in the team. In contrast, organizations that cultivate cultural intelligence are able to adapt their services to the needs of multicultural markets and improve their performance (Ljubica & Dulcic, 2012).

Despite the importance of interculturality, many tourism organizations do not have a clear strategy for leveraging cultural intelligence in their management. Often, initiatives are limited to fragmented intercultural communication seminars or based on the individual experience of executives. This theoretical article examines how cultural intelligence can function as an integrated strategic management tool in tourism. Specifically, it aims: (a) to highlight the dimensions of CQ and its connection with organizational behavior, (b) to analyze the role of CQ in key administrative functions of tourism organizations, such as leadership, customer service and human resource management, and (c) to propose practices for integrating CQ into the strategy and daily processes of organizations.

This paper starts from the basic assumption that cultural intelligence is not just a personal skill, but can be a strategic asset for the organization. As has been suggested in the literature, CQ can act as a "filtering mechanism" when formulating a strategy, helping managers design more effective strategies tailored to multicultural markets (Ljubica & Dulcic, 2012). In other words, organizations with a high collective level of CQ may respond faster and more effectively to the changing demands of the international tourism market and achieve a competitive advantage through understanding and satisfying the culturally diverse needs of their customers (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Teimouri et al., 2015).

In the following sections, the theoretical framework of cultural intelligence is developed and its application in the field of tourism management is analyzed. It will examine how the various dimensions of CQ (metacognitive, cognitive, kinetic/motivational, behavioral) contribute to organizational behavior and how they can be exploited by management. Then, the role of CQ in leadership, customer service and human resource management in tourism contexts will be discussed, with reference to both international studies and examples from the Greek reality where appropriate. Finally, concrete practices for the integration of CQ into tourism management will be proposed, while the discussion will summarize the theoretical contributions and propose directions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Definition of Cultural Intelligence and its Dimensions

The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) was introduced by Earley and Ang (2003) who defined it as "the ability of the individual to learn new patterns of cultural interaction and to react effectively to them" (Earley & Ang, 2003). Simply put, CQ reflects how well one can understand unfamiliar cultural contexts and adjust one's thinking and behavior accordingly. In new cultural situations, where familiar "signs" and habitual social norms are absent, individuals with high CQ have the ability to create a new cognitive framework that helps them correctly interpret local behaviors and norms (Earley & Peterson, 2004). This flexibility of thinking and learning makes CQ a distinct form of intelligence, offering predictive power for effectiveness in intercultural contacts beyond general intelligence or other skills (Ang et al., 2007; Rockstuhl et al., 2011). According to the prevailing theoretical approach, cultural intelligence is a multidimensional phenomenon with four interrelated dimensions (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008):

- *Metacognitive dimension.* It refers to the higher cognitive processes that allow individuals to become aware of and control their learning in intercultural settings. Metacognitive CQ involves being aware of cultural differences, planning before an intercultural meeting, and reflecting during it (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). For example, a hotel manager with a high metacognitive CQ will prepare in advance for the cultural expectations of a group of visitors from a new market, adjusting its mentality accordingly. The metacognitive dimension is crucial because it allows executives to distance themselves from their own cultural context and not consider their own culture as an absolute point of reference. This allows them to design truly customer-oriented services and solutions, without cultural blinders.
- *Cognitive dimension.* It is about the individual's knowledge about cultures – i.e., the understanding of events, rules, customs, and practices of different cultural groups (Ang et al., 2007). Cognitive CQ reflects a broad background of cultural knowledge: from social norms and religious beliefs to business ethics and historical elements that influence behaviors. For example, a tourism executive with a high cognitive CQ knows that tourists from different countries may have different perceptions of the concept of timely service or what constitutes courtesy. This dimension allows the manager to anticipate possible cultural misinterpretations and adapt service procedures, thus helping to reduce intercultural conflicts and create a positive climate for the client (Triandis, 2006).
- *Motivation/motivational dimension.* It refers to the individual's inner motivation, self-confidence, and interest in engaging in multicultural interactions (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang et al., 2007). CQ Motivation reflects the person's intention and willingness to learn about new cultures, overcome the stress that the unknown can cause, and persevere despite possible difficulties in communication. In the environment of a tourism organization, the Motivation/Motivational Dimension is seen in whether employees derive satisfaction from serving customers of different cultures and whether they remain engaged when facing cultural barriers. A receptionist with strong Kinetic/Motivational CQ, for example, will show an active interest in understanding the client from a foreign country and will not be discouraged by potential language difficulties or unusual requests (Min, Kim & Agrusa, 2021). This dimension has been found to be correlated with persistence and effective adaptation to new cultural environments, critical elements for the success of expatriate executives or staff who travel frequently (Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

- *Behavioral dimension.* It is the ability to adapt a person's behavior and expressions to fit different cultural norms and expectations (Ang et al., 2007). It includes both verbal and non-verbal behaviors – from body language, expressions of politeness, to adapting communication styles. In the tourism industry, behavioral CQ is seen when employees respectfully imitate the protocol and habits of the hosted ethnicities. For example, A tour guide with high behavioral intelligence will use appropriate gestures, adjust their tone of voice, or adjust the level of intimacy in encounters with tourists from different cultures, avoiding behaviors that may be considered offensive or awkward. This dimension is highly practical and has a direct impact on the quality of interpersonal interaction: employees with behavioral flexibility avoid cultural mishaps and create a sense of respect and comfort in foreign customers (Alshaibani & Bakir, 2017).

These four dimensions work together to shape a person's overall level of cultural intelligence. For example, cognitive cognition without Kinetic/Motivational mood may remain unexploited, while metacognitive awareness without corresponding behavioral flexibility may not translate into appropriate actions. Research shows that the integrated development of all four aspects of CQ is associated with higher efficiency in tasks involving cultural differences (Ang et al., 2007). In the context of tourism organizations, executives with holistically developed CQ can not only perceive cultural dynamics, but also respond with appropriate leadership and service, inspiring trust in customers and staff of different cultures.

2.2 CQ and Organizational Behavior in Tourism Organizations

Organizational behavior in tourism is deeply influenced by cultural diversity – both in the internal environment (employees from different cultures, multinational work groups) and abroad (variety of customers). Cultural intelligence functions as a critical predictor of positive behaviors and attitudes in such an environment. Specifically, high CQ in executives and employees has been correlated with:

- *Improved communication and collaboration in the multicultural team.* Employees with developed cultural intelligence understand their colleagues better from other countries and adapt their communication style accordingly, reducing misunderstandings. Research in multinational companies has shown that high CQ leads to more effective communication and increased job satisfaction (Bücker et al., 2014). This is also true in hotels or travel agencies where multicultural teams of staff work together on a daily basis – CQ helps to building a common understanding and a positive climate.
- *Strengthening trust and cohesion.* When team leaders demonstrate cultural sensitivity and adaptability (i.e., high CQ), team members feel more respected and understood. This leads to a reduction in conflict and an empowerment of a sense of "belonging" to the team (Groves & Feyerherm, 2011). In a travel agency, for example, a manager with a high CQ can bridge cultural gaps between employees (e.g., different perceptions of time or hierarchy) and create a common organizational culture of inclusion.
- *Higher job satisfaction and lower fatigue.* Studies suggest that employees who feel able to cope with cultural challenges (i.e., have a high CQ) experience lower levels of burnout and greater commitment to their work (Yuan et al., 2023). Especially on the front lines of tourism – e.g. receptionists who handle daily requests from customers of different cultures – CQ works protectively, as it gives individuals the confidence and skills to cope with demands without being mentally strained. Indeed, it has been found that cultural intelligence is positively associated with job satisfaction and negatively with workers' stress when they are in foreign cultural conditions (Bücker et al., 2014).
- *Better problem-solving and innovation.* An often underestimated area is the contribution of CQ to creative thinking and problem-solving. Culturally sensitive employees and managers tend to look at problems from multiple perspectives and avoid cultural stereotypical solutions (Triandis, 2006). This fosters innovation within the organisation: for example, an international hotel chain can benefit from the ideas of a multicultural staff, where the CQ of members facilitates the sharing of knowledge between different cultural "pools" of experiences. In addition, openness to cultural differences fosters an environment where employees feel that their unique perspectives are valued – something that has also been linked to the increased employee voice. For example, recent research in the catering industry has shown that employees with high CQ are more actively involved in making proposals to management, thereby improving services and innovation in the organization (Yuan et al., 2023).

Overall, cultural intelligence shapes an organizational behavior of inclusion and adaptability. In tourism organizations with a high level of CQ, it is observed that the different cultural identities of staff and customers are treated as a source of learning and collaboration rather than as barriers (Earley & Peterson, 2004). This leads to multiple benefits: dynamic management of HR diversity, improved team cohesion and trust, as well as the flexibility of the organization to rearrange its practices according to the cultural demands of the market. As Ang and Van Dyne (2008) note, cultural intelligence is not just a personal trait but can positively influence the collective efficiency of the organization, creating a work environment where multiculturalism is harnessed and integrated into daily operation.

2.3 CQ and Strategic Management of Tourism Organizations

Strategic management is about planning and implementing long-term directions that will ensure the prosperity and competitiveness of an organization. In the tourism industry, the strategy must take into account a particularly colorful mosaic of markets, cultures and customer expectations. Cultural intelligence is emerging as an important strategic ally for tourism organizations, offering a kind of "lens" through which administrations can see the markets and chart a course.

First, CQ enables leaders to more efficiently execute the critical strategic process of environmental scanning. Since tourism is influenced by social and cultural trends (e.g., new traveler preferences, emerging markets from different countries), managers with high cultural intelligence are better able to identify signals of change in various cultural sectors. For example, a marketing manager of an international hotel chain with developed CQ will detect a change in the travel habits of an emerging market (e.g. China or India) earlier and suggest adjustments to the product or promotional campaign. In this way, CQ strengthens the strategic insight of the organization, acting as a filter that distinguishes which cultural information from the external environment is important for the strategy (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008).

Second, cultural intelligence helps shape strategies that are truly customer-centric and tailored to multicultural markets. As a relevant study in the hotel industry highlights, strategic decisions made by managers with high CQ are more likely to align with the cultural values and preferences of the target customers (Ljubica & Dulcic, 2012). For example, the choice of amenities in a holiday package or the design of the visitor experience in a museum can be influenced by an understanding of cultural differences: tourists from Asia may appreciate different types of culinary experiences or level of technology than European tourists. A tourism organization with high CQ leadership will strategically incorporate these differences into the product design, avoiding the trap of "indifference" or one-dimensional approach to markets.

Thirdly, CQ also seems to play a role in the implementation of the strategy, particularly in multinational tourism organisations. A well-designed strategy can fail if it is not executed effectively by an organization's international network. Here, the collective cultural intelligence of the organization – the processes, values, and abilities that enable people from different cultures to work together – determines success. For example, adopting a new customer service protocol across all of a chain's hotels worldwide requires local executives to understand and implement this strategy in a way that is compatible with the local culture. Organizations with a high CQ make sure to translate their strategy with sensitivity to local conditions – e.g., they provide guidance to local branches on how a corporate model will adapt to the ethos of each country. This prevents the intolerance of local markets to "foreign" strategies and ensures uniformly high quality of services with respect to diversity (Earley & Peterson, 2004).

Finally, cultural intelligence is linked to an organization's strategic flexibility and ability to learn from its experiences. Tourism businesses operate in an environment of uncertainty and constant change – new destinations are emerging, geopolitical events are changing tourist flows, travel trends are evolving. CQ in management fosters a culture of organizational learning where strategic mistakes in a market are analyzed without bias and lessons are learned for the future. For example, if an initiative in a particular country did not work due to cultural misunderstandings, an organization with a high CQ will recognize the cultural causes of the failure and adjust its strategy, rather than simply attributing the blame to "market dysfunction." This dynamic adaptation is consistent with the concept of dynamic competencies in strategic management, where learning and resource reconfiguration are central – here CQ functions as a dynamic capability that allows the organization to recognize when cultural changes require strategic modification (Krizman, 2019).

In summary, cultural intelligence is part of the strategic arsenal of tourism organizations as an inherently connective skill: it connects the organization to its international environment, connects strategic conception with local implementation, and connects the global brand culture with the local cultures of customers and employees. Thus, tourism organizations that invest in CQ can move beyond a "one size fits all" mentality and adopt a truly global and locally sensitive strategy – which in today's era of personalization of the travel experience, is key to sustainable success.

3. ROLE OF CQ IN THE MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS

In this section we look at how cultural intelligence is applied to three key pillars of tourism management: (a) leadership, (b) customer service, and (c) human resource management. In all three of these areas, CQ acts as a catalyst that improves practices and outcomes, as documented by the international literature and the experience of organizations.

3.1 Leadership and Cultural Intelligence

Leadership in tourism often extends beyond a country's borders – leaders are called upon to lead multicultural teams, manage subsidiaries in different countries, and work with international partners. In this cross-cultural leadership project, cultural intelligence is one of the most critical skills (Rockstuhl et al., 2011). Research findings suggest that leaders with high CQ achieve greater influence and effectiveness in cross-border environments than leaders with high IQ or EQ but low cultural intelligence.

Specifically, CQ influences leadership in the following areas:

- *Vision and inspiration.* A leader with developed cultural intelligence can formulate a vision that resonates with people of different cultural backgrounds. He understands what motivates employees in different parts of the world and uses culturally appropriate symbols and messages when communicating the organization's vision. For example, the head of an international tour operator can project the value of hospitality in ways that touch the Greek tour guide and the Indian travel agent equally – something that requires sensitivity to cultural perceptions of hospitality. This ability implies that the leader speaks in the "language" of his followers (figuratively and literally) in order to inspire commitment to the common cause (Groves & Feyerherm, 2011).
- *Decision-making and conflict resolution.* Leaders often have to make decisions that affect people from different cultures. High CQ helps to evaluate situations impartially, without cultural bias. In addition, in cases of conflict in multicultural groups, leaders with CQ act as bridges: they recognize the cultural causes of misunderstandings and find solutions that respect all sides (Earley & Ang, 2003). On a multinational cruise ship, for example, where the crew comes from a dozen different countries, a captain with a high CQ will be able to perceive that a disagreement between two departments may stem from different perceptions of discipline or personal responsibility, and will resolve the dispute in a way that takes these perceptions into account rather than simply imposing their own culture as "right."
- *Empowerment and mentoring.* Leadership does not only mean "top-down" mentoring, but also people's development. Leaders with CQ are more effective as mentors in multicultural environments because they can adapt their leadership style according to the learning style, values, and needs of the mentee (Ng et al., 2009). For example, a hotel manager in Greece who mentors a young manager from Japan will adapt his feedback – perhaps adopt more indirect and discreet – knowing that in some cultures public criticism is a particularly sensitive issue. Thus, the leader's CQ ensures that the talent development process within the organization takes into account cultural diversity and is effective for everyone.
- *Creating a culture of inclusion.* Leaders with high cultural intelligence consciously shape an organizational culture that embraces multiculturalism. They set an example themselves – e.g. by learning key phrases in the languages of their partners, celebrating international holidays – and set standards of behavior that promote respect for diversity. Research reports that such leaders succeed in creating a "voice" climate in the organization where employees, regardless of cultural background, they feel comfortable expressing ideas and concerns (Yuan et al., 2023). This inclusive culture is associated with positive organizational outcomes, such as innovation and reduced staff exit intent.

In the Greek reality, we can see examples of leaders in tourism who have put CQ into practice. For instance, managers of large Greek hotel groups that expanded into Middle Eastern markets had to demonstrate a high degree of cultural intelligence: from adapting their management model to more hierarchical or more collective models, to understanding the cultural details that affect the experience of Arab visitors (e.g., food issues, separation of spaces for families). Those of them who managed to align their corporate vision with local values, are considered successful examples of intercultural leadership that combined Greek hospitality with respect for local cultures.

Overall, cultural intelligence strengthens leadership in tourism by making it more flexible, equitable, and effective in a globalized environment. Schematically, we can say that CQ helps leaders "see more" (metacognitive awareness), "know more" (cognitive understanding), "want more" (motivational motivation), and "do better" (behavioral adaptation) when leading across cultural boundaries.

3.2 Customer Service and Cultural Intelligence

At the core of every tourism organization is customer service – direct contact with the traveler, the visitor, the tourist. This "moment of truth" where the customer interacts with the service provider is crucial for the satisfaction, loyalty and reputation of a tourism organization. Cultural intelligence is emerging as a central tool for improving service in an internationalized customer environment, as it allows frontline personnel to provide personalized, culturally sensitive services (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). Key ways CQ boosts customer service:

- *Understanding the customer's needs.* Customers from different cultures often have different expectations and perceptions of what constitutes "good service." A traveler from Japan may appreciate discretion and formality, while a traveler from Brazil may prefer a warm, friendly approach. Staff with high cultural intelligence have the ability to perceive these subtle differences and adapt their approach. This means asking the right questions, observing the client's body language, and modifying their way of speaking or level of solemnity to match the client's culture (Arora & Rohmetra, 2012). Thus, the customer feels that they really understand him, which leads to higher satisfaction.
- *Adjust service behavior.* The behavioral dimension of CQ, as mentioned, plays a crucial role in service. Receptionists, tour guides, waiters or travel agents with developed CQ will adjust their behaviors according to the customer they have in front of them. For example, they will know if they should offer a handshake or if it is considered unfamiliar in a culture; They will know if it is appropriate to make eye contact for an extended duration or if this can be perceived as rudeness. These details create an atmosphere of respect and comfort. Studies in international hotels have shown that the adaptability of staff to the cultural norms of foreign visitors is positively associated with service quality ratings and customers' intention to buy back (Alshaibani, 2015). Essentially, staff CQ translates into customer experiences that seem to be "cut and sewn" to their needs.
- *Complaint management and service recovery.* In cases where something is wrong and the client is unhappy, cultural intelligence can make the difference between escalating the conflict or resolving it effectively. An employee with a high CQ will perceive the way different customers express their dissatisfaction. For example, some may express themselves directly and intensely (considering it normal), while others more indirectly. Staff who understand these differences will not misinterpret tension as a personal attack or ignore indirect signs of dissatisfaction from more reserved customers. Instead, they will respond with empathy adapted to the cultural context: they may adopt a more apologetic style with a client who expects it, or they will proceed to clarifying questions with a client who hints at the problem without saying it openly. In this way, the problem is solved more efficiently, leading the customer back to satisfaction. Research in a hotel environment in India has shown that staff cultural intelligence is significantly associated with a higher customer satisfaction score, especially in the dimensions related to courtesy and understanding on the part of employees (Arora & Rohmetra, 2012).
- *Co-creation of experiences.* Today, the trend in tourism is for customers to be actively involved in shaping their experience – for example, through personalized activities, interacting with the local culture, or exchanging feedback in real-time. The cultural intelligence of the staff allows this co-creation to become meaningful. A tour guide with CQ doesn't follow a strict predetermined script, but reads their audience and incorporates elements that fit their culture – perhaps allow a visitor from Latin America to participate more actively in the tour because they notice that they enjoy it, while with a group of Scandinavians it will give more space for silent observation if they find that they prefer it. This dynamic customization makes guests feel like "co-producers" of the experience, leading to memorable experiences reflected in positive reviews and word-of-mouth.

The above have also been confirmed by scientific studies. A long-term survey of hotels in Iraq found that the cultural intelligence of frontline employees indirectly improves the perceived quality of service by foreign customers through its effect on employee performance (Alshaibani & Bakir, 2016). Employees with a higher CQ were rated by their superiors as more efficient, and these employees provided services that foreign visitors rated higher. In other words, CQ not only helps the employee to be better at their job, but this is directly reflected in the customer in the form of better quality service (Alshaibani, 2015; Alshaibani et al., 2016).

From a practical point of view, many tourism businesses that have made use of CQ have seen tangible benefits. For example, Greek hotels that adopted intercultural training for reception staff reported a decrease in customer complaints from specific ethnic groups because staff learned how to prevent misunderstandings (e.g. by explaining in advance what

breakfast includes for Chinese customers who have different habits). Similarly, tour operators who trained their guides on cultural intelligence principles saw an increase in tourist satisfaction scores on multinational tours, as tour guides were able to actively engage all nationalities and create a team atmosphere despite differences.

Overall, cultural intelligence in customer service means that the organization doesn't just offer a service, but an experience that takes into account who the customer is, where they come from, and what they consider important. This leads to higher levels of satisfaction, better reviews, and often a *more valuable relationship* with the customer, who feels respected and welcomed (Teimouri et al., 2015).

3.3 Human Resource Management (HRM) and Cultural Intelligence

Human resource management in tourism organizations includes processes such as staff selection and recruitment, training and development, performance evaluation, and talent retention. In an industry where multiculturalism characterizes both the workforce and the customer base, HRM needs to integrate cultural intelligence as a key element of its practices. Key HRM areas where CQ plays a role:

- *Recruitment and selection of personnel.* Tourism organizations now often set intercultural competence as a criterion when selecting new employees, especially for positions with international exposure (Charoensukmongkol, 2016). This means that in addition to technical skills, elements such as openness to diversity, ability to communicate with strangers and life experience in different cultural environments are evaluated – all indications of high cultural intelligence. In fact, some large multinational hospitality companies have adopted CQ testing at the recruitment stage, believing that candidates with a high CQ will integrate more smoothly into the company's international culture and serve customers better (Ang et al., 2007). Research, it has been found that executives with a high CQ perform better in international assignments and a higher probability of successful adaptation abroad (Kim & Van Dyne, 2012). Thus, the HR of tourism organizations with an international presence counts CQ as an indicator of future performance, especially for roles such as hotel managers in foreign countries, sales executives in international markets or coordinators of multinational project teams.
- *Education and development.* Perhaps the most critical area is staff training in cultural intelligence. Since CQ is not a static quality but can be developed through experiences and targeted training (MacNab et al., 2012), many HR departments in tourism invest in intercultural skills training programs. These programs may include: intercultural communication seminars, scenario simulations with clients from different countries, staff exchanges between hotels in different countries, and even response programs where employees briefly live as "tourists" in a destination to get a sense of the visitor's point of view. Research in the aviation industry (which has a lot in common with tourism in terms of multiculturalism) has shown that only about half of companies offer formal training for CQ development, but those that do notice improved performance and more "responsible" behaviors from their staff (Krizman, 2019). In Greece, initiatives such as the European project "Cultural Intelligence in the Age of Artificial Intelligence" implemented by tourism operators, have trained dozens of executives on intercultural awareness issues, enhancing their ability to manage the growing mix of refugee, migrant and tourist populations in popular destinations. Systematic training increases the "shares" of cultural intelligence within the organization, making it part of its learning culture.
- *Performance evaluation and rewards.* If an organization considers cultural intelligence important, this must also be reflected in the criteria by which it evaluates and rewards its staff. Progressive HR departments have incorporated CQ-related indicators into evaluations – for example, they assess how effectively an employee manages clients from different countries or how well they work together in multicultural teams (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). May include feedback on adaptability, respect for diversity and initiative to solve intercultural problems. In addition, organizations are starting to link rewards (bonuses, promotions) with the demonstration of such skills. For example, a hotel floor manager who has been able to improve the satisfaction ratings of a new national customer market, due to his actions to train his team in the culture of those customers, may be recognized and rewarded. This reward system alignment with CQ sends a message to all staff that cross-cultural skills are valued and actively encouraged.
- *Diversity management.* HR in tourism is often called upon to manage a multicultural workforce – employees from different ethnicities, either in the same unit (e.g. a cruise ship with 30 crew nationalities) or in units distributed internationally. The cultural intelligence of HR managers allows them to design policies that ensure equal treatment

and participation of all. For example, they will be careful that promotion processes do not only favour those belonging to the dominant culture of the company, they will make sure that translations of important announcements are available, organize events that highlight cultural diversity (e.g. international kitchen days in the staff canteen) and provide conflict resolution mechanisms sensitive to incidents of cultural tension. All of this is part of a holistic inclusion strategy, where cultural intelligence acts as a guide. Such practices not only improve employee morale and engagement, but can reduce turnover, as employees feel that their organization understands and supports them in working in a multicultural context.

It is noteworthy that the positive relationship between the cultural intelligence of HR managers and the effectiveness of diversity management initiatives has been researched. For example, a study in tourism businesses in Spain found that companies that invested in the development of HR managers' CQ were able to successfully implement integration programs for migrant workers, reduce discrimination, and increase employee satisfaction (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2018). Administrators' CQ acted as an inclusive factor that made diversity policies work in practice, rather than staying at a theoretical level. It's also worth noting that HR cultural intelligence also helps with labor legislation and compliance when the organization operates in multiple countries. For example, a Greek travel organization employing staff in Middle Eastern countries needs to respect local labor practices (such as separate working hours during Ramadan, or additional days of leave for Eid). An HR manager with a high CQ will prevent such issues and align company policies with local conditions, ensuring both compliance with the law and employee satisfaction.

Overall, in human resource management, cultural intelligence is a horizontal axis that runs through all functions: from bringing the right people to the team, developing and retaining them, to creating a work environment where diversity is an asset and not a problem. Tourism organizations that adopt this approach are better positioned to have a flexible, competent and loyal human resource ready to provide excellent services in a global tourism market (Teimouri et al., 2015).

4. PROPOSALS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF CQ INTO ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE

Based on the theoretical analysis, it becomes clear that cultural intelligence should not be treated as an abstract concept, but as a specific ability that can be incorporated into the practices and systems of a tourism organization. Here are suggestions in three key axes – training, skills assessment, and strategy integration – on how organizations can cultivate and leverage CQ:

4.1 CQ Development Training Programs

Lifelong learning of cultural intelligence should become part of the organization's culture. It recommends the development of specialized training programs for staff and management, with an emphasis on experiential learning and exposure to a variety of cultural scenarios. Indicative actions:

- *Interactive intercultural communication workshops.* Participants practice through role-playing in realistic situations (e.g., managing a customer request from a different culture, resolving a conflict in a multinational team). Feedback from trainers helps to understand the metacognitive processes (what they thought, what they could have done differently). Such workshops will develop not only knowledge but also the self-awareness and adaptability of employees in real time (MacNab et al., 2012).
- *Rotation programs and international assignments.* The practice of cyclical movement of workers between units in different countries or regions is encouraged. Even internally, transferring an employee from a cosmopolitan city hotel to a resort that serves other nationalities for a few months will give him invaluable experience. Empirical research shows that international experience and exposure to different cultures measurably increases cultural intelligence (Ng et al., 2009). It is recommended that organisations facilitate such experiences – even through short-term secondments or staff exchanges with partner companies abroad.
- *Intercultural development mentoring.* The establishment of a mentoring system where executives with high CQ mentor their colleagues as "cultural mentors". This can be done informally (e.g. an experienced executive undertakes to introduce a new manager to the customer culture from a specific market) or formally (designed coaching programs). In this way, the knowledge that the "experts" have through experience is disseminated throughout the organization.

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- *E-learning and microlearning.* Given the seasonality and the intense pace of work in tourism, short digital courses can provide flexibility. E.g. short 5-10 minute videos covering "*Tips for Customer Service from China*" or "*Key Phrases and Greetings for Arab Tourists*" can be integrated into the organization's e-learning platforms so that employees can learn on the go. These are not a substitute for deeper training, but they keep the attention on CQ alive and equip staff with *practical tools for immediate use*.

An organization that systematically follows the above will build a talent pool with a high CQ. In the long run, this investment in education reduces the need to "cure" problems (e.g., crises due to cultural mishaps) because it prevents them, while increasing the chances of success in new markets thanks to a flexible, culturally intelligent staff (Krizman, 2019).

4.2 Skills Assessment and Recruitment

In order for CQ to be integrated into the culture of the organization, it must also become part of the evaluation and selection systems. Proposed:

- *Integrating CQ into recruitment processes.* As already mentioned, the use of CQ assessment tools for candidates (e.g. self-assessment questionnaires or studied interview scenarios that examine reactions to cultural situations) can help identify people with high potential. If this is not possible for all positions, at least for key positions such as heads of departments with international exposure, intercultural competence should be assessed. A practical way is the simulation test: e.g. the candidate is asked to deal with a virtual customer complaint from another country and its handling is observed.
- *CQ-related performance targets.* When setting goals (KPIs) for employees, some goals can be set that are related to improving or demonstrating cultural intelligence. For example: "Participate in at least 2 intercultural education activities this year" or "Improve customer satisfaction from X country by Y%". These push employees to take CQ seriously in their daily work and give a clear priority message from management.
- *360° feedback with an emphasis on CQ.* In the 360-degree assessments (if used), ask questions about whether the evaluatee demonstrates sensitivity and effectiveness in a multicultural environment. For example, colleagues evaluate "X respects and understands the views of colleagues from different cultures" or subordinates "My supervisor creates an acceptable environment for everyone". These elements can be part of the overall performance picture and identify and areas that need improvement.
- *Promotion of CQ "ambassadors".* Recognition and reward of those executives who are role models of cultural intelligence. An award or mention (e.g., "Intercultural Service Excellence Award") may be established for the employee who has demonstrated exceptional competence in intercultural service or collaboration. This public recognition not only rewards the worthy employee, but also sets an example for others, encouraging them to emphasize the development of their own CQ skills.

CQ-based assessment and recruitment ensures that the organization has the right people in the right positions. As Teimouri et al. (2015) noted, tourism organizations should "hire individuals with high cultural intelligence" to achieve excellence in multicultural service. Following this prompting, management is transforming CQ from a theory into a tangible recruitment practice.

4.3 Integration into the Strategy and Structures

Finally, it is proposed that cultural intelligence be explicitly included in the strategic planning and organizational structure of the tourism organization:

- *Mission and Values Statement.* If the company has a vision/value statement, the concept of interculturality and respect for diversity should be reflected there. For example, a value could be "We respect and understand the cultural specificities of our customers, partners and employees" or "Global perception – local care". This sets the tone from the highest level that the organization is committed to cultural intelligence as a philosophy.

- *Strategic market planning*: When drawing up plans for expansion into new tourism markets or segments, an analysis of cultural factors should be included. For example, before a Greek travel agency targets the Chinese market, its strategic plan will include a study of Chinese travel culture, adaptation of marketing (e.g. use of appropriate symbols, colors) and possibly hiring a consultant or partner with knowledge of the market. actions In the strategic plan, cultural intelligence becomes an integral part of the strategic implementation and not something after the fact.
- *Structures and roles*. Creating specific roles or teams that focus on cross-cultural management. For example, a "Director of Diversity and Cultural Excellence" in the organization, or an interdepartmental "CQ Taskforce" team that undertakes improvement initiatives (such as organizing cultural events, evaluating customer experience from different cultures, etc.). These structures institutionalize CQ and ensure that there is a continuous focus on the topic, even when the daily workflow is distracting.
- *Knowledge systems and KM*. Integration of CQ into the organization's knowledge management systems. For example, an internal database where staff records "*cultural intelligence notes*" – lessons learned from the customer service of a particular country, or tips on how to best handle a situation. In this way, every new employee or employee facing a new culture for the first time can refer to the collective knowledge of the company. transforms CQ from an individual attribute to an organizational resource.
- *Metrics and reporting*: Develop measures that track the company's performance in dimensions relevant to CQ. E.g. "multicultural customer satisfaction index" (from satisfaction surveys filtered by ethnicity), or "percentage of achievement of CQ training goals for staff". Include these metrics in regular reports to management. This keeps the topic visible to top management and allows for timely action if the organization is lagging behind.

The above proposals require commitment and resources, but the benefits justify the effort. A tourism organization that has incorporated CQ into its "DNA" will be able to: hire better people, develop them faster, avoid expensive mistakes in new markets, offer superior service and innovate by leveraging diversity. In other words, it will possess a strategic flexibility and resilience in a world where cultural variables are decisive (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008).

5. DISCUSSION-THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The present paper attempted to combine two fields of knowledge – the theory of cultural intelligence and the management of tourism organizations – illuminating how their coupling can be beneficial both on a practical and theoretical level.

First, the article gathers and synthesizes scattered knowledge from different fields: intercultural psychology, management, and tourism studies. Although cultural intelligence has been studied extensively in international business and human resource management, its application in the specific context of tourism remains relatively limited (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2018). This article, therefore, bridges this gap by proposing a holistic framework that connects the dimensions of CQ with critical functions of tourism organizations.

In addition, it offers a conceptual expansion: it treats CQ not only as an individual difference, but also as an organizational capacity that can be strategically integrated. On a theoretical level, this suggests that CQ can be viewed through the prism of resources and capabilities (resource-based view) – an intangible resource that adds value, is scarce, impaired and appropriately organized, and can therefore be a source of competitive advantage for a tourism organization (Ang & Inkpen, 2008). This perspective enriches strategic theory in tourism by introducing cultural intelligence as a performance factor in the model.

The findings and arguments presented are consistent with previous empirical studies. For example, the emphasis on the effect of CQ on customer satisfaction is supported by the findings of Alshaibani and Bakir (2016) and Arora & Rohmetra (2012), while the role of CQ in leadership and team effectiveness agrees with studies such as those of Rockstuhl et al. (2011) and Groves & Feyerherm (2011). This gives weight to practical proposals – they are not just theoretical guesses, but aligned with evidence-based results. At the same time, the present paper also raises new questions, paving the way for further research:

Collective CQ and organizational performance. How can we measure cultural intelligence at the organization level and whether this collective CQ is related to performance indicators (e.g., profitability, market share in international markets)? Future studies could develop metrics of "organizational CQ" and empirically examine its relationship with operational outcomes in the tourism industries.

Digital Age and CQ. With the increasing use of technology (e.g., digital assistants, online customer service), the question arises as to how cultural intelligence interacts with digital communication. For example, can digital service platforms incorporate CQ principles (e.g., adapting language and style according to the user's cultural background)? And how are employees trained to transfer their CQ to an online environment? Especially after the experience of the pandemic where digital communication exploded.

CQ and sustainability/social responsibility. As tourism shifts towards sustainability and corporate social responsibility, the potential relationship of cultural intelligence with respect for local communities and cultural sustainability is of interest. Could managers' CQ contribute to more responsible practices, avoiding cultural appropriation and enhancing the authenticity of experiences? with local cultures, thanks in part to the CQ of their leaders.

Cultural intelligence and crises. Tourism is vulnerable to international crises (health, political, etc.). One question is whether CQ in the organization acts as a factor of resilience during crises that have cultural dimensions (e.g. managing panic or changes in the behavior of travelers from different countries in a pandemic). Future research may explore e.g. case studies of hotels that managed COVID-19 cases with multicultural customers and how staff CQ affected the outcome. In addition, theoretically, the relationship of CQ with other concepts in tourism, such as the tourist experience and the tourist feeling, could be examined. For example, how the guide's cultural intelligence affects the tourist's sense of "belonging" in a foreign land, or how CQ interacts with the *emotional labor* so often required in tourism (Lam et al., 2022). These are topics that link micro- (psychological) processes to macro-experiences in tourism, expanding the theory in an interdisciplinary way.

Theoretically, therefore, this paper reinforces the argument that cultural intelligence is a multidimensional lever for improvement in tourism management. It offers a frame of reference for professionals: from the HR Manager who wants to justify investments in intercultural education, to the General Manager who draws up a plan to enter a new market, they now have in their hands a coherent narrative (backed by theory) because CQ is central to their effort. This framework bridges the gap between academic knowledge and application – the very essence of theoretical contribution: to guide action by illuminating non-obvious connections.

Cultural intelligence is presented not as "just another theory", but as an emerging paradigm in the management of tourism organizations. By combining elements of behavior, leadership and strategy, it allows us to think of the tourism organization as an actor of *cultures* – an organization that learns, evolves and succeeds through its interaction with the culturally diverse world. This interdisciplinary view is the main theoretical contribution of the article.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In today's globalized tourism landscape, where people and cultures meet every day, cultural intelligence has emerged as a critical factor for the success of tourism organizations. This article thoroughly analyzed how CQ – with its metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral dimensions – can be integrated into management, offering multiple benefits. The central conclusion is that cultural intelligence functions as a multi-tool for the manager. It facilitates the leadership of multicultural teams, improves the quality of service provided to international clients, and strengthens HR practices in diverse work environments. The tourism organizations that cultivate CQ develop an internal culture of respect, learning and adaptability, which translates externally into loyal customers, good reputation and competitiveness in international markets. Importantly, CQ is not an inherent talent of a few, but a skill that can be developed and disseminated organizationally. The proposals presented – from training programmes to changes in HR processes – provide a roadmap for tourism businesses wishing to turn theory into practice. Step by step, integrating cultural intelligence into strategy and operations can make an organization more resilient to the challenges of the global tourism market and more capable of seizing its opportunities. As it turned out, the implementation of CQ is also important in the Greek context. With tourism being a central pillar of the economy, Greek tourism businesses that will adopt cultural intelligence principles can offer superior experiences to international visitors and stand out for their professionalism and flexibility. From the hotel that welcomes guests from every corner of the globe to the travel agent that builds partnerships abroad, CQ is becoming a common denominator of success. In conclusion, cultural intelligence offers an optimistic perspective on how we manage diversity in tourism: instead of being seen as a barrier, it is treated as a strategic resource. A prerequisite for this is the conscious effort of the organizations to cultivate it. Theory and examples show that the effort is worth it. In a changing world where cultures interact more than ever before, tourism organizations with high cultural intelligence are not only

more efficient – they are also more human, creating bridges of understanding and experiences that remain unforgettable for customers and employees alike. This is perhaps the greatest implementation perspective of CQ: to make tourism truly a celebration of cultures, for the benefit of all involved.

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