CHAPTER 1

CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE (CQ): AN OVERVIEW

Performance Skills

- Understanding cultural intelligence
- Understanding the importance of cultural intelligence
- Identifying nine essential megaskills
- Understanding the bottom-line importance of cultural intelligence
- Identifying three key strategies for developing cultural intelligence

REFLECT BEFORE READING

How is cultural diversity changing the skills we need in the workplace?

“As a Muslim, I choose to wear a head scarf. While this is an external symbol of my deep faith, I choose not to discuss my religion with others unless they ask me. When I walk into interviews wearing my head scarf, I tend to notice the surprise in people’s faces. They seem to lose interest in me, and I wonder if it has anything to do with my appearance. This is very different from the treatment I get over the phone.”

“I am a female technician. I work for a phone company. On the job one day, I was climbing up a telephone pole. The homeowner and four of his friends were watching from below. One of the men yelled up, ‘Fix it right or we’ll spank you.’ A short while later, I told the men I needed a tool from my truck. I came down the ladder, locked the doors, and took off.”
“I am not comfortable being singled out for praise from my supervisor. What does this say about my coworkers? It implies that they are not doing a job as well as I am. In my native country of Indonesia, this is frowned upon.”

“In a meeting where I’m the only woman, I quietly suggest an idea but nobody acts like they are interested. A few minutes later, a man firmly says something very similar and all of a sudden people are acknowledging his input and running with it.”

“I teach math in a suburban high school to the north of Washington, DC. I come from Puerto Rico and have a noticeable accent. The first year I taught calculus, I spent endless hours defending my ability to teach this class. Parent after parent called to try to get me removed from my position. I persevered. At the end of the year, our high school got the highest number of passing scores on the AP Calculus test in the history of our school.”

“As a childless worker, I find I have to put in more hours at work than my coworkers with kids. They are the ones who are allowed to leave early or come to work late.”

“I was an intern with a nonprofit agency that serves homeless families. On my first day of work, I was assigned to my client, Marie, and her two-year-old son. Marie had been in the U.S. for 2 weeks. Marie spoke Spanish only. I spoke English only. I was supposed to work with Marie once a day helping her with all aspects of daily living.”

“To me, the Bible dictates how I should think and act. When I come to work, I bring my religion with me. I got into an argument with a coworker. I told him how uncomfortable I felt when he talked about what he did after hours—the partying, the relationships he has, even his values. Ever since, I have noticed considerable friction between us.”

“I no longer wear a tool belt. Instead, I keep my tools in a carrying case. When I first wore the belt, I found that male customers were coming up to me and touching the tools on my belt.”

“I work at a hospital. The diversity of the staff has given rise to a number of problems. Recently, patients complained about a group of Filipino nurses who were talking in their own language within earshot of them.”

“The candidate I was interviewing kept looking down and did not establish eye contact. This made me question his qualifications. I was aware of his cultural background and thought maybe this was his way of being respectful. But then I started to think. He was applying for a position for which interpersonal skills are extremely important. What does this say about his ability to handle this job?”

“How many times has a customer entered my department and walked right past me to the closest nonblack face? Too many. But now I take pleasure in the fact that the person they choose to talk to sends them right back to me. They have to talk to me whether they want to or not.”
All of these real-life personal experiences involve ordinary interactions in today’s workplace. It is a world of potential misunderstandings, bias, conflict, and missed opportunities. It is also an exciting, vibrant, and emerging world where cultural differences give rise to all kinds of possibilities.

How well prepared are we to excel in an environment in which these multicultural scenarios continue to increase in frequency and importance? Do we have the necessary knowledge? And, if so, do we have the wisdom to know when, where, and how to apply this knowledge? What do we do when we find ourselves stymied or taken aback by how much we do not know? Perhaps most importantly, do we have the motivation to make a long-term commitment to learn, change, and adapt?

Each day, we are reminded of the skills we need as we increasingly cross borders, encounter ambiguous behaviors and gestures, and seek to make sense of a seemingly endless variety of values. At home and abroad, many of us struggle to relate to cultural strangers. Whether we have the ability and drive to thrive in this global, changing environment will be pivotal in determining our success.

CHANGING REALITIES

Data from the most recent U.S. Census illustrate how demographic and cultural change is transforming the world in which we live. People are living and working longer. Since 1980, the number of people in the United States 65 and older working or looking for work has grown by more than 50%. Religious diversity is increasing. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people are becoming more open about their identity. Increasingly, people with disabilities are gaining access to the workforce. Racial and ethnic minorities now constitute roughly one-third of the U.S. population, and by the year 2050, the Census estimates this figure will grow to one-half. In particular, the number of Hispanics and Asians is expected to continue to experience dramatic growth in the future.

These demographic changes impact every facet of business, including customers and clients. Buying power refers to the total personal income that is available, after taxes, for purchases of goods and services. Data from a recent report by the University of Georgia’s Selig Center for Economic Growth shows the buying power of racial minorities increasing much faster than that of Whites. The figure for Hispanics, who can be of any race, is projected to jump 357% during this same time span (see Figure 1.1).

As the multiethnic and multiracial consumer markets expand dramatically, women, seniors, and people with disabilities are changing the face of consumers as well. The growth of the senior market (age 60 and older) will far

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly one in five people in the United States are potential customers for businesses accessible to people with disabilities.

(U.S. Census Bureau)
outpace the growth of the rest of the adult market (see Figure 1.2). At present, women represent slightly more than half of the U.S. population but account for 85% of all consumer purchases. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the percentage of people with disabilities (about 20%) is greater than any single racial or ethnic group in the United States today. Their buying power is almost two times the buying power of teens (U.S. Department of Labor).

As customers and markets become more diverse, so does the U.S. labor force (see Figure 1.3). The labor force participation rate for women has increased significantly during the last few decades, from 43% in 1970 to a projected figure of 62% by 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). As Figure 1.3 shows, the labor force growth rate of minorities is outpacing Whites, and this trend will continue. This trend is a reflection of the recent upsurge in minority populations. The influx of immigrants contributes to much of this growth.

While these changes are significant, they do not reflect the impact of global business and cross-cultural relationships in which boundaries and time zones are increasingly irrelevant. The global economy is diversifying the world's workforce and changing how we think, team, communicate, and do business.

As these trends contribute to new social and economic realities, more attention is being directed at inclusion, the feeling of belonging and acceptance. Inclusion means moving beyond tolerating or just putting up with diversity. People feel validation and genuine appreciation.

Diversity does not guarantee inclusion. In some cases, diversity is accompanied by barriers, including bias, cultural misunderstandings, and a
Figure 1.2 • Market Growth: Seniors vs. Remainder of Adult Market

**Age 18–59**

- 2005: 162 million
- 2010: 166 million
- 2015: 170 million
- 2020: 174 million
- 2025: Projected

**Age 60 and over**

- 2005: 40 million
- 2010: 45 million
- 2015: 50 million
- 2020: 55 million
- 2025: Projected

CHAPTER 1

CULTURE: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Culture refers to a people’s way of life that is socially learned, shared, and transmitted from generation to generation. Perhaps it is useful to think of culture as a tool kit or a design for living. If we look inside our kit, we might find tangible creations such as our favorite books, clothing, and perhaps a computer. Other creations are intangible or abstract, such as personal values, religious beliefs, and ideas about how people should act in different situations.

Given the inclusiveness of the term culture, it becomes apparent that differences and similarities among cultures could refer to any number of things. People might share a common ancestry and history, family background, political viewpoint, or religion. Or they might differ in terms of where they grew up, their age, social class, education, or exposure to cultures other than their own. Hence, there is an infinite variety of ways in which we and others might be culturally alike and dissimilar.

In a national opinion poll of registered voters, 94% agree that "America’s growing diversity makes it more important than ever for all of us to understand people who are different than ourselves." (Association of American Colleges and Universities).

DID YOU KNOW?

Figure 1.3  • Labor Force Growth Rates of Minorities Will Outpace Whites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Projected Percent Change, 2002–2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Projected percent change, 2002–2012

It is important to familiarize ourselves with two dominant views of cultural differences and similarities. One view overemphasizes how much we are alike and pays scant attention to our differences. Because we are all one big “melting pot,” our cultural differences are insignificant or irrelevant. The other view trains our eye on the different ingredients in the “pot.” When we take this to the extreme, we focus so much on the differences that we forget how much we are alike.

Both of these viewpoints can be problematic. Viewing culture one way or the other narrows our perspective, restricts our understanding, and impairs our ability to relate. What is needed is the ability to integrate and modify both viewpoints by recognizing and respecting both our similarities and differences.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

Today’s employees need cultural intelligence (CQ); that is, those key competencies that allow us to effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in all kinds of settings.

Where Am I Now?

DIRECTIONS: For each statement, mark M (most of the time), O (often), S (sometimes), R (rarely), or N (never).

1. _____ When I meet someone from another culture, I am aware of the physical space between us.
2. _____ When I communicate with someone from another culture, I am aware of my tone of voice.
3. _____ When I participate on multicultural teams, I am aware that my experiences may be very different from the experiences of my teammates.
4. _____ I realize that I have a difficult time listening to certain people because of my biases.
5. _____ I am aware of the different ways in which I might express bias.
6. _____ I am aware of my cultural values when I interact with people from very diverse countries and cultures.
7. _____ I understand that gender roles may vary significantly among people from various cultural backgrounds.
8. _____ I understand the difference between prejudice and discrimination.
9. _____ I understand how cultural intelligence (CQ) promotes an organization’s ability to achieve its goals.
10. _____ I understand why it may be necessary for me to change my nonverbal behaviors in a new cultural setting.

11. _____ I understand why CQ requires more than just good intentions on my part.

12. _____ I understand why it is important to be aware of differences in power and privileges.

13. _____ In a new cultural setting, I vary my verbal and nonverbal language when necessary.

14. _____ When I communicate with people from culturally diverse backgrounds, I ask questions to make sure I have heard and understood all of the relevant details.

15. _____ When I observe people showing cultural insensitivity or bias, I intervene in some way.

16. _____ I seek feedback from others regarding my biases.

17. _____ I seek feedback from others regarding my ability to manage cross-cultural conflict effectively.

18. _____ When I interact on multicultural teams, I check the accuracy of my knowledge about other cultures.

The preceding self-assessment provides insight into your current CQ. Questions 1 to 6 relate to your awareness, questions 7 to 12 measure your understanding, and questions 13 to 18 deal with your behaviors or skills. What do your answers reveal about your CQ, and specifically your awareness, understanding, and skills? When you examine these three competencies, are there any differences or similarities that stand out?

If you marked “M” for most or all of the statements, you see yourself as culturally intelligent, at least as far as these indicators are concerned. If you responded “N,” “S,” and/or “R” to many statements, you do not rate yourself as high on CQ. What this means varies from individual to individual. For example, individuals may have similar competencies but rate themselves differently because their expectations and self-awareness vary. Regardless of how we evaluate ourselves on these and other indicators of CQ, we must view building CQ as a never-ending process for continual improvement.

The competencies that make up CQ are constant awareness, cultural understanding, and CQ skills:

**Constant Awareness.** This competency refers to our ability to always be mindful or cognizant of oneself, others, and the cultural context. For example, this awareness allows us to tune into our biases at any given moment and how those biases reflect our cultural upbringing.
Cultural Intelligence (CQ): An Overview

Figure 1.4 • CQ Components

*Cultural Understanding.* This involves exposing oneself to information about cultural differences and similarities and grasping what this information means as well as its significance.

*CQ Skills.* This refers to our ability to do something and do it well as a result of training, experience, and practice. Clearly, there is a difference between knowing what to do and actually doing it. As we practice and refine these skills, they become more automatic.

As Figure 1.4 shows, these three competencies are interdependent. Each competency impacts the others. To illustrate, our skill level in communicating effectively with others who are culturally different is dependent on our awareness of them and ourselves as well as our understanding of this process.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

We often do not respond well to cultural diversity. CQ changes that. It allows us to view people, and what they “bring to the table,” differently. Through CQ, differences become possibilities for learning, personal growth, and relationships. Our world becomes bigger and more complex as we develop CQ. We move from assuming that cultural diversity is a deficit to understanding that cultural differences embody potential. What we do with that potential is up to us.

More specifically, CQ opens us up to new experiences. In addition to being more informed about what we might encounter in cross-cultural relationships, we are better prepared to deal with culture shock, or the disorientation we
experience when encountering new, radically different situations. Because we can appreciate multiple perspectives and make appropriate adjustments in our behavior, we are much better able to quickly adjust and relate effectively to others whose backgrounds are not at all like ours.

As realities change in today’s multicultural, global environment, CQ becomes a critical component of everybody’s résumé. Unfortunately, research shows that while employers desperately need workers with CQ to adjust to changing workplace and workforce realities, many employees do not measure up. To complicate matters further, CQ cannot be manufactured in a short period of time. It takes work, motivation, and constant practice.

It is not unusual for employees with excellent technical skills to possess low CQ. Often, there is a singular focus on technical skills: the ability to use the “tools” and procedures unique to a specific field. According to a new study by Leadership IQ, a leadership and training company, nearly half of newly hired employees fail within 18 months. What these new hires lack are interpersonal skills rather than technical skills, such as the inability to manage their own emotions and accept feedback from others.²

**YOUR TURN**

Which of your competencies would you rank higher—your “technical” expertise in a specific area or your CQ? Why?

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**IDENTIFYING NINE MEGASKILLS**

Different situations require a variety of skills. With regard to CQ, there are certain skills that are of paramount importance. This book refers to these as the nine megaskills (see Figure 1.5). A megaskill is a powerful, fundamental skill that is absolutely necessary for excelling on the job and in other areas of life.

Building CQ is no easy task. We need to nurture and practice those cognitive and behavioral skills that allow us to adapt and excel in any and all environments. Further, retooling and reeducating ourselves is an ongoing process that can be humbling and uncomfortable at times. With the proper mindset and motivation,
we can develop the following nine megaskills that are absolutely critical in any workplace:

1. Understanding My Cultural Identity—Understanding how we think about ourselves as well as the people and ways of life with which we identify.
2. Checking Cultural Lenses—Recognizing the ways in which cultural backgrounds differ and how they influence thinking, behavior, and assumptions.
3. Global Consciousness—Moving across boundaries and seeing the world from multiple perspectives.
4. Shifting Perspectives—Putting ourselves in others’ shoes and cultures.
5. Intercultural Communication—Exchanging ideas and feelings and creating meanings with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
7. Multicultural Teaming—Working with others from diverse cultural backgrounds to accomplish certain tasks.
8. Dealing with Bias—Recognizing bias in ourselves and others and responding to it effectively.
9. Understanding the Dynamics of Power—Grasping how power and culture interrelate and the effect of power on how we see the world and relate to others.

Where Am I Now?

**DIRECTIONS:** Rank yourself on the following megaskills. For each, mark M (need much improvement), S (need some improvement), or L (need little improvement)

1. _____ Understanding My Cultural Identity
2. _____ Checking Cultural Lenses
UNDERSTANDING THE BOTTOM-LINE IMPORTANCE OF CQ

REFLECT BEFORE READING

In what ways might promoting CQ improve an organization’s success?

In the past, cultural intelligence was seen as an extra; that is, something that might be useful to some people in the workforce. Cultural diversity issues were ghettoized, meaning they were only dealt with within a particular department such as human resources or community relations. “One-size-fits-all” products and services were marketed to the average consumer. When interacting, cultural differences were ignored or seen as irrelevant.

Because monocultural organizations were the norm, issues dealing with diversity were often seen as divisive and counterproductive. In short, cultural diversity was something to control, curtail, and avoid if possible.

A major challenge in all types of organizations is the ability to understand the bottom-line importance of cultural intelligence. In one study, one of the most significant findings had to do with the fact that many respondents did not understand what impact diversity had on them personally; nor did they understand why diversity is important.

Now, leaders in areas such as business, education, health care, government, military and law enforcement, and human services are much more apt to approach cultural intelligence as a bottom-line issue. In other words, employees with CQ megaskills impact the overall success and survival of an organization (see Figure 1.6). CQ changes the way employees interact with their customers and clients. As employees develop their CQ megaskills, their ability to assess and understand the cultural context of any social interaction increases. This, in turn, allows them to increase customer/client satisfaction by building relationships and adapting to the diverse needs of individuals. Even small changes in the range and magnitude of one’s skills can have a profound influence on productivity, profitability, and other bottom-line issues.
Since the cultural diversity of workers and customers affects everyone within an organization, CQ is now viewed as an essential rather than a “nice-to-have” competency. CQ impacts the bottom line for a variety of reasons (see Table 1.1).

### Table 1.1 • Rationale for CQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bottom-Line Issue</th>
<th>Rationale for Developing CQ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding lawsuits and other forms of intolerance that</td>
<td>Bias, including discrimination, is expensive. Even if it does not result in a lawsuit, bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>devalue diversity and threaten productivity</td>
<td>wastes human potential and alienates customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being flexible and innovative</td>
<td>Being able to shift perspectives makes it possible to continually reexamine basic, traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assumptions. In turn, this can foster development of new and better products and services and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recognition of new opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximizing utilization of human capital</td>
<td>Respecting and valuing differences breaks down walls, increases trust, and improves performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving problems</td>
<td>Seeking, understanding, and evaluating multiple perspectives allows for better solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching out to a changing, global marketplace and new</td>
<td>Designing and developing products and services are much easier when we understand markets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>populations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One way of maximizing the potential benefits of diversity is by training workers to develop CQ. As an example, a national department store (Saks Fifth Avenue) uses a customized video-based program to train its employees to provide quality service to a culturally diverse customer base. Vignettes show customers interacting with actual Saks employees in a variety of situations. Jay Redman, vice president of service and selling, is clear about the rationale for the training. "We estimate that every customer interaction for us is about $250 dollars, so if you only treat 1,000 customers inappropriately, that’s a lot of money."

**CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE MYTHS**

I spend a good deal of time discussing the importance of being able to deal with cultural diversity effectively. When I do, myths invariably surface. These myths are usually some variation of the following:

*CQ is only important for some jobs and some people.* No one group has a monopoly on cultural ignorance or bias. People of all colors, cultures, and backgrounds, regardless of position or line of work, need to continually examine, develop, and refine their CQ.

*Developing CQ is all about changing people’s awareness.* Most of the training in this area is aimed at promoting awareness of self and others.
The assumption being made is that once we become more culturally aware, our behaviors will change. But is this necessarily true? Think back to those times we discriminate or act irrationally even though we know better. Awareness is only a first step.

**CQ training aims to change people’s values.** While this might be true of some diversity training, any CQ training ought to respect all values. Rather than changing or even judging values, CQ is about being aware of our values and those of others, and the relationships among people’s values, behaviors, and cultural backgrounds.

**There is some simple formula or strategy for developing CQ.** This thinking is typical of many training programs, especially those of short duration with little or no follow-through. Most cultural diversity training is one day or less in length. Learning CQ becomes a quick fix: an event rather than a process. While developing skills in making presentations or using the Internet is a fairly straightforward and standardized process, developing CQ is much more complex and variable from person to person and situation to situation. The challenge is not just to learn the skills, but to regularly use the skills effectively.

**CQ comes naturally to people with good intentions.** In other words, if my heart is in the right place, that’s enough. Clearly, understanding and respecting cultural diversity is not just something that happens because you see yourself as a person of character and you mean well.

**IDENTIFYING THREE KEY STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE**

A Chinese proverb states, “I see and I forget. I hear and I remember. I do and I understand.” Building CQ involves three key action-oriented strategies—assessing CQ, taking responsibility for learning, and optimizing learning. With sufficient practice, you will learn to employ each of these strategies as you continue to develop CQ.

**REFLECT BEFORE READING**

What do you think is the most effective way to develop cultural intelligence? Why?
CHAPTER 1

YOUR TURN

The way we relate to others affects how they relate to us. For example, we might be surprised by a negative reaction we get from people because our perceptions do not align with theirs.

Strategy #1: Assessing My Cultural Intelligence

One of the ways in which we can evaluate our CQ is to be constantly alert to the reactions of others. Another way is to simply ask others who observe our interaction. At work, for example, we might ask our superior, our subordinates, and our peers questions about our CQ. For example, we might inquire about how well we relate to people of different ages or people who do not speak our language.

In seeking feedback, look for your own mentors, especially those people whom you admire. Learn from them, even though you may not identify with them. Compare what others think about you with what you think about yourself, and pay particular attention to those areas where there is a sizable gap.

You can seek input informally, such as when you engage in a casual conversation or send an e-mail to someone. Or you might prefer something more structured, such as asking certain individuals to complete a form such as the following.

My Cultural Intelligence: Please Assess

DIRECTIONS: I am genuinely interested in how you view my interpersonal skills with people of various cultural backgrounds. Please answer honestly, in order that I may identify those areas in which I need improvement. For each statement, write SA (strongly agree), A (agree), D (disagree), or SD (strongly disagree). Thank you.

1. _____ I adjust easily when I sense my behaviors make it difficult for others to approach or talk to me.
2. _____ I spend considerable time with people who are very different from me.
3. _____ I have very good communication skills.
4. _____ People of all different backgrounds enjoy teaming with me.
5. _____ I am able to “shift gears” and adopt multiple perspectives.
6. _____ I am open to suggestions from everyone, regardless of their job or position.

YOUR TURN

The way we relate to others affects how they relate to us. For example, we might be surprised by a negative reaction we get from people because our perceptions do not align with theirs.
Being able to analyze this exchange and understand how different people might interpret what took place is a skill. As part of their diversity training, employees at Denny's restaurant chain analyze this very situation. Depending on their cultural perspective, people may view this interaction between the cashier and the customer in any number of ways. Therefore, the correct answer to the question above is “any of the above.”

Another method of self-evaluation involves constant reflection on one's own behaviors. Consider those people with whom you interact on a daily basis. Do you listen more attentively to those people whose communication style is similar to yours? Do you neglect to engage or speak to people who occupy certain positions, such as supervisors, clerical workers, or custodial staff? Whose names don’t you know?

Continually assessing and reassessing our cultural intelligence is not an easy task. Sometimes, we are reluctant to evaluate ourselves out of fear of what we might find. Furthermore, it is one thing to become aware of our lack of cultural intelligence; it is quite another to maintain that awareness and commit to change.

TO LEARN MORE

To access a short CQ self-assessment tool, go to www.culturalq.com/selfassess.html. Respond to each of the 20 items. Then, examine how you evaluate yourself in each area of the assessment: CQ Strategy, CQ Knowledge, CQ Motivation, and CQ Behavior.

Strategy #2: Taking Responsibility for My Learning

YOUR TURN

What is one specific thing you can do on a regular basis in order to take responsibility for your personal growth in the area of cultural diversity?
Taking responsibility for our own learning means taking advantage of learning opportunities both at work and elsewhere, including experiential, collaborative, and e-learning. In effect, we become the CEO for our own personal development. As CEO, motivation is critical.

Without motivation, we will not persevere or adjust when we encounter obstacles and setbacks. Motivation allows us to keep our focus on our goals during the inevitable failures that arise from cultural misunderstandings. Being aware of why CQ is a bottom-line issue for ourselves and our organizations fuels our motivation.

For example, how do we react when we encounter someone with an accent that makes communication nearly impossible? Do we avoid engaging that person in conversation? If we lack motivation, perhaps we might ask others to listen and interpret for us. If we find ourselves communicating with that person face-to-face, do we go through the motions of listening or do we redouble our efforts? With motivation, we will work harder to ask questions, listen carefully, and acknowledge our own difficulties in understanding.

Developing CQ is a cumulative process. Since culture is fluid and changes from one moment to the next, part of the challenge of developing and applying CQ is adapting, reevaluating, and tailoring how we respond to specific situations.

Learning leads to change, although it may be difficult for us to see. Small, incremental steps lead to major breakthroughs. This is the idea behind the Japanese word *kaizen*, the relentless quest to improve a little each and every day.

We will not maximize our learning unless we become self-directed learners. Even though this requires us to be proactive, it does not necessarily mean participating in formal training. Some of the most valuable lessons occur when we engage in activities that may appear totally unrelated to cultural diversity. This is called *incidental learning*: unintentional learning that results from everyday activities. Opportunities for this type of learning abound. For example, incidental learning may occur during the process of teaming. When working with other individuals on a group project, we might learn valuable lessons about cultural diversity, human interaction, and bias.

Self-directed learners listen actively, ask questions, and then reflect back on what took place. Imagine you are eating lunch with a group of coworkers. One of them comments, “I don’t understand why Americans call a sunny day a good day.” You can ignore the comment, or probe more deeply. A colleague of mine found herself in this very situation. She wanted to find out more, so she asked her coworker to elaborate. Whereupon the person who made this comment explained that he grew up in India. He went on, “In India, it is not uncommon for temperatures to be in excess of 100 degrees. Where I lived, there is little or no air-conditioning.” He added, “A day with lots of clouds is a good day.”
By being proactive and asking questions, my colleague learned something about cultural diversity. Although this was not something she planned when she sat down for lunch, she turned a simple comment into a valuable learning experience. And this experience has become a catalyst for more learning, since her coworker is now more inclined to share other parts of his cultural background.

**YOUR TURN**

When it comes to developing your CQ, do you see yourself as a volunteer, a vacationer, or an unwilling recruit? Why?

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Stephen Covey talks about modeling, by which he means taking responsibility for finding one's own mentors and developing a relationship with each of them. Our relationships with others provide feedback on our strengths and limitations. Personal development is a collaborative process. Self-improvement cannot be done in isolation from others.

**Strategy #3: Optimizing My Learning**

For us to benefit from learning opportunities, planned or incidental, we need to be mindful of a number of things. Learning is optimized when we

- Understand the value of what we learn. What are the bottom-line benefits of those competencies you have been developing and practicing? Many people question the relevance of training that focuses on some aspect of interpersonal skills. To them, mastery of technical skills is what really matters. Research does not support this; rather, both CQ and technical skills are essential.

- Actively participate in the learning process. Active learning refers to a continuous cycle of action and reflection. We build on our knowledge by trying it out in a variety of settings and constantly monitoring how successful we are at listening.

- Apply what we learn. Workers at one large restaurant chain take 10 to 15 minutes each morning to learn a new skill aimed at improving customer service. Then they practice that skill for the rest of the
day and seek further help or feedback when necessary. Learning is incomplete unless we take it with us, put it to work, and practice it again and again.

- Develop an individual action plan. For instance, target certain megaskills over a period of time. Think through what you can do to develop, measure, and reevaluate them. Reassess your plan continually in light of your priorities and needs. One possible template for an action plan might include the following:

1. Specific skill you plan to work on.
2. Your strategy for developing skill.
3. What you will do and when.
4. Possible obstacles.
5. Necessary resources.

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**YOUR TURN**

Learning Opportunities

**DIRECTIONS:** For each of the following learning opportunities, describe one specific thing you can do to expand your understanding of cultural differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Opportunities</th>
<th>What I Can Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiential learning—learning by doing rather than simply talking about it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning—learning by working with others on some project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic learning—learning by taking advantage of a variety of opportunities, including courses and training that are offered in the classroom and online</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-learning—learning via computer technology, such as surfing the Web</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incidental learning—learning by taking advantage of every opportunity that presents itself, including those that are unexpected and unplanned</td>
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A Look Back: I Have Learned

✓ _____ How cultural diversity is changing realities.
✓ _____ The meaning of culture.
✓ _____ The meaning of cultural intelligence.
✓ _____ Why cultural intelligence is important.
✓ _____ To identify the nine megaskills of cultural intelligence.
✓ _____ Three key strategies for developing cultural intelligence.

Notes
