

Assessing the Levels of Cultural Intelligence among Human Resource Managers and Academics in Bulgaria: Implications for the Local Culturally Diverse Workforce

Hristina SOKOLOVA*

University of Ruse Angel Kanchev, Ruse, Bulgaria¹

*Corresponding author, hsokolova@uni-ruse.bg

Abstract. *Workforce and education are going through significant changes during the tumultuous redefining of the global socio-economic landscape. In the context of revised globalization, this paper investigates the similarities and differences in the levels of cultural intelligence (CQ) between Bulgarian human resource managers (recruiters) and university professors. Cultural intelligence theory is often used to assess the intercultural competence of organizational leaders and employees. Bulgaria is facing increased internationalization of both higher education and workforce structure, at the moment. The rise in third-country employment in Bulgarian industry poses the question of whether recruiters and their companies are ready to integrate foreign workers. The paper presents results from comparisons of CQ levels between 118 Bulgarian recruiters and 455 Bulgarian academics. Research methods include descriptive statistics and correlational analysis. The study employs three hypotheses – H1: There is no significant difference between levels of communication difficulties among Bulgarian HR managers and university professors; H2: There is a significant difference in the overall CQ levels between Bulgarian HR managers and university professors, with the metacognitive and motivational CQ dimensions bearing the largest difference; H3: There are correlations between CQ and professional experience of Bulgarian HR experts. Results show that H1 is confirmed, H2 and H3 are rejected. The text suggests applicable solutions to increase CQ levels among both groups, and discusses the possible outcomes for culturally diverse HEIs and workforce. Analysis is based on the measured intercultural competence of academics and recruiters, and the nexus between the roles of universities and employers in increasing cultural diversity.*

Keywords: recruiters, academics, cultural intelligence, intercultural competence, descriptive statistics, culturally diverse workforce.

Introduction

With the rapid steps in redefining globalization, managing cultural diversity has become a challenging necessity among professionals in all sectors. The issues are especially relevant in Bulgaria, where the growing cultural heterogeneity affects both the workforce and the higher education institutions (HEIs). Human Resource (HR) managers and academics are key actors in shaping inclusive environments. Thus, their levels of cultural intelligence (CQ)—the ability to function effectively in diverse cultural settings—have become critical to the integration of diverse individuals, and responding to diverse needs.

Cultural intelligence is a concept which is used to signify the necessary qualities to adapt in foreign cultures. It is understood as a synonym for other concepts, such as intercultural competence and intercultural self-efficacy. Cultural intelligence according to Earley and Ang

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(2003), or CQ in short, includes metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions of someone's intercultural self-efficacy. High CQ among HR managers is a prerequisite for an inclusive hiring process and effective diversity management of personnel, while academics with strong CQ are capable creators of flexible learning environments. CQ theory, widely used to assess intercultural competence in organizations, offers an efficient framework for intercultural competence evaluation in academia and business. HR managers' CQ directly influences organizational diversity initiatives, while university professors, as educators and cultural mediators, prepare future professionals for a globalized labor market.

Therefore, the goal of this paper is to examine and compare CQ levels among Bulgarian HR managers and academics alike, exploring their implications for the local culturally diverse workforce. By measuring intercultural competence, it seeks to understand how CQ impacts organizational and educational outcomes. The paper highlights the relationship of roles between universities and employers in advancing cultural diversity. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration in enhancing intercultural competence among all people involved.

The author believes that there's a growing necessity to understand the current state of cultural intelligence among key stakeholders in Bulgaria. Such knowledge could provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with managing people from different cultures. The study highlights the similarities and differences in CQ, and in this way uncovers areas for improvement in intercultural competence. Bulgaria is going through increased reliance on foreign labor and understanding this issue is growing in importance to most stakeholders. There is also an increasing number of international students in local universities. That's why through the findings of this paper the author hopes to provide actionable insights for both HEIs and employers. We need to underscore the necessity for targeted training programs and institutional policies in support of cultural diversity.

In the light of the aforementioned, the main goal of research is, first, to assess and compare the levels of cultural intelligence among HR managers and university professors in Bulgaria and, second, to explore how inclusive work and academic environments can be created. Therefore, the author presents three hypotheses, detailed in the methodology section – the first one tests the difference between levels of communication difficulties among Bulgarian HR managers and university professors, the second one addresses the difference in overall CQ of Bulgarian HR managers and university professors, the third one measures the correlations between CQ and professional experience.

The study contributes to the growing body of research on cultural intelligence by addressing the above-mentioned hypotheses and by offering practical recommendations for improving intercultural competence in Bulgaria's increasingly diverse social and professional landscape, and building upon previous research (Sokolova and Ilieva, 2024).

Literature review

Characteristics of Bulgarian corporate and academic cultures

Bulgarian culture is unique in its duality of features, combining Eastern and Western influences. Its peculiarities often interfere with Western-born corporate cultures. Bulgarian authors (Sotirova, 2014) have examined the so-called "Bulgarian-ness" – a phenomenon which reveals Bulgarian self-perception as a concept deeply rooted in negative emotions like frustration, for instance. Sotirova (2014) claims that there is an intense connection with the dichotomy between the concepts of Eastern Europe and the Orient, and Western values. According to her work, the local (Bulgarian-

ness) feels inherently backward and needs to be changed to “Western” to become “good”. Typical societal self-narratives represent the Bulgarian as self-serving, underdeveloped, slower and not really adequate to the modern world. Such study is relevant to the literature on cultural intelligence (CQ) in Bulgarian organizations, where **the negotiation of identity impacts approaches to diversity and inclusion**. HR managers and academics who need to navigate such situations require CQ to address these psychological tensions effectively. Leaders can create inclusive environments but only when they respect local identity while aligning with global practices. After all, CQ has a critical role in Bulgarian contexts and must give way to further the analysis on this topic.

According to Mladenova and Davidkov (2023) Bulgarian corporate culture balances traditional structures and modern adaptability, with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) dominating the business sector. SMEs are characterized by flexibility, innovation, and reliance on personal leadership, with strongly family-based or family-like culture. They adopt good practices from larger firms, emphasizing corporate communication, motivation, and stakeholder engagement for competitive advantage (Dimitrova, 2024). Larger local companies often retain hierarchical and centralized norms, reflecting historical management styles. Foreign subsidiaries employ more diverse management approaches. Overall, communication is central to corporate culture, with SMEs favoring informal styles to foster agility but lack systematic processes (Dimitrova, 2023). Digital tools are gaining popularity in some sectors, but personal and face-to-face interactions remain the norm (Dimitrova, 2024). Some of the challenges include resistance to advanced practices, a limited focus on cultural training, and weak emphasis on intangible assets like ethics and employee development, which affect long-term sustainability of the organization (Dimitrova, 2024).

Bulgarian academic culture on the other hand has been shaped by two transformative waves—the post-1989 openness to global markets and post-Covid-19 digitization. It has gone through early cultural diversification and has become much more multicultural than its corporate counterpart. The influx of foreign students has increased diversity within higher education institutions (HEIs), thus fostering a culture of informal, and later formal inclusivity. HEIs operate under the Higher Education Act, which promotes institutional autonomy and alignment with national policies (MON, 2020). Universities prioritize research and internationalization, focusing on global competitiveness while balancing centralized governance with flexible pedagogical approaches.

Despite long-established traditions in collaboration and inclusivity, disparities still exist between research and teaching-focused institutions. Resource constraints often limit academic staff from fully participating in global networks (Dimitrova, 2024). HEIs emphasize multicultural engagement through cultural intelligence (CQ) training, enhancing faculty effectiveness in managing diverse classrooms and research teams (Dimitrova, 2024). The integration into global frameworks like the Bologna Process has driven outcome-based learning and collaboration. However, language barriers and resistance to change hinder the full realization of these initiatives (MON, 2020).

Therefore, Bulgarian corporate and academic cultures exhibit contrasting trajectories. While SMEs strive for innovation within traditional frameworks, HEIs are progressively integrating multicultural perspectives and global practices. Both face challenges that require strategic efforts to enhance inclusivity, adaptability, and long-term sustainability.

Definitions of cultural sensitivity in organizational contexts

Cultural sensitivity refers to the awareness, understanding, and respect for the cultural differences, norms and practices of individuals from different backgrounds. It is essential in global organizational contexts via its role to influence core processes such as multicultural leadership practices (Bratianu, Paiuc & Bejinaru, 2024). This part of the review synthesizes the definitions, presents some measurement tools, and discusses applications of cultural sensitivity. The review is based on the provided literature, with a focus on the implications for organizations around the world.

Cultural sensitivity, or intercultural competence, is described as the recognition of cultural differences and the ability to adapt behaviors and attitudes with respect to these differences. It serves as a foundation for effective cross-cultural interactions (Samiei & Soltani, 2022). Successfully developed cultural sensitivity includes a functional and shared cognitive framework to understand diverse cultural norms and behaviors. The goal is to build effective communication and collaboration in a multicultural setting (Menon & Narayanan, 2015).

Cultural sensitivity is measured through tools. Measurement of intercultural competence is necessary because in this way professionals can become aware of their ability to adapt to foreign cultures. On the other hand, organizations need highly competent leaders, and measuring this type of competence is useful for assessing performance. The first measurement tool is the ***Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)***. It is a widely recognized model for measuring cultural sensitivity in individuals. The scale includes four dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. These dimensions reflect how well individuals know to navigate and adapt to diverse cultural environments (Abdeldayem, Aldulaimi, & Alazzawi, 2022). Another measurement tool, or a set of tools, includes the so-called ***Cultural Competence Models***. These models emphasize self-awareness, cultural knowledge, and adaptive skillsets critical for managing cross-cultural interactions within organizations (Minkov, 2024).

Intercultural competence assessment is applied in organizations for several reasons. First, in *leadership and decision-making*, where high cultural sensitivity among leaders is necessary to achieve team goals (Deng & Gibson, 2008). Second, in *employee performance management*, some studies highlight a positive correlation between cultural sensitivity and employee performance. Employees with higher cultural intelligence demonstrate better collaboration, adaptability, and conflict resolution skills in culturally diverse workplaces (Samiei & Soltani, 2022). Third, in *organizational culture development*, because organizations with strong cultural sensitivity integrate diverse perspectives into their mission and operational strategies. This has been particularly effective in transitioning economies such as Bulgaria, where organizations are evolving from centrally planned to entrepreneurial cultures (Greenberg & Erdinç, 1999). The last application is in *training and development*. Cultural sensitivity training programs improve diverse employees' and managers' abilities to work together. These programs are critical in multinational corporations and sectors like healthcare and education (Menon & Narayanan, 2015).

The role of cultural intelligence in Bulgarian higher education and work contexts

Cultural intelligence (CQ) plays a vital role in creating inclusive spaces for people in higher education and workplace environments in Bulgaria. Bulgarian higher education institutions (HEIs) consistently increase the number of international students and faculty. This leads to a growing necessity for cultural sensitivity training. HEIs face the dual challenge of creating inclusive environments for learning but also preparing students for the global labour market. Having high levels of CQ empowers educators to understand and adapt in untypical communicative situations (Wei & Yue, 2023). So far practical experience shows that training programs aimed at developing

CQ among academic staff do help in improving cross-cultural interactions in classrooms, and also in enhancing learning outcomes for students (Dimitrova, 2024). HEIs should embed multicultural perspectives into curricula and extracurricular activities. In this way they will be able to prepare students how to cope in a diverse professional environment.

In Bulgarian workplaces, CQ could drive inclusivity by equipping managers and employees with the skills for effective management. This is relevant here because local workplaces are becoming multicultural due to the integration of third-country nationals into the workforce. Intercultural competence is vital in two areas: leadership and team dynamics, and employee engagement. Leaders with high CQ create inclusive workplaces by adapting their communication and decision-making to respect cultural differences. This reduces workplace conflicts and improves collaboration (Wei & Yue, 2023). CQ also facilitates effective teamwork in multicultural environments, improving problem-solving and innovation by leveraging diverse perspectives (Dimitrova, 2024). Inclusive workplaces supported by CQ lead to higher employee satisfaction and retention (Presbitero, Fujimoto & Lim, 2025). This is achieved through tailored diversity management practices that address cultural needs and promote equity (Dimitrova, 2024).

In conclusion, cultural intelligence is an essential competency for inclusive environments in Bulgarian HEIs and workplaces. By enhancing cross-cultural understanding and interactions, CQ contributes to better academic outcomes and workplace harmony. Its integration into training and organizational policies is vital for coping in Bulgaria's increasingly diverse educational and professional landscapes.

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative approach to examine cultural intelligence (CQ) levels among Bulgarian human resource (HR) managers and university professors. The primary data collection tool is a structured questionnaire, distributed via Google Forms to two distinct samples in the following timeframes: for Bulgarian university professors – September 2023 – January 2024; for Bulgarian HR experts – October 2024 – January 2025.

Sample and Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed among a total of 4000 potential participants, with 573 responses received with an overall response rate of 14.3%. The sample included 1500 Bulgarian HR managers, of whom 118 responded (response rate: 7.9%), and 2500 Bulgarian university professors, with 455 responses collected (response rate: 18.2%). The sample is relevant because it represents the key professional groups who influence organizational and educational change in Bulgaria. Participants were invited personally by the author through email and her LinkedIn professional network, and additionally in cooperation with the Bulgarian Diversity Charter – an initiative to promote DEI policies and strategies among Bulgarian organizations.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire assessed participants' cultural intelligence using established measures, covering the four CQ dimensions (see appendix). It captured the following demographic and professional background information: occasion for being abroad; communication difficulties during contact with foreigners; professional experience in HR and academia, and other demographic data (age and gender) not relevant to the object and goal of this paper. This quantitative method could provide replicable, empirical findings, applicable to both policy recommendations and practical applications in Bulgaria and abroad.

Hypotheses

The study tested three hypotheses:

H1: *There is no significant difference between levels of communication difficulties among Bulgarian HR managers and university professors.* The hypothesis is based on the assumption that both groups are required to communicate extensively in their line of work.

H2: *There is a significant difference in the overall CQ levels between Bulgarian HR managers and university professors, with the metacognitive and motivational CQ dimensions bearing the largest difference.* The hypothesis is based on the assumption that university professors have greater intercultural experience, therefore cultural intelligence, and have greater motivation to work with foreign individuals, than HR experts (Sokolova and Ilieva, 2024).

H3: *There are correlations between CQ and professional experience of Bulgarian HR experts.* This hypothesis is based on the assumption that longer professional experience correlates with improvement in soft skills (Fakhrou et al, 2022).

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using JASP statistical software (v. 0.19.1.0), and employed the following approaches: means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were calculated for all variables (*descriptive statistics*); a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to explore the relationship between CQ dimensions and professional experience (*correlation analysis*); mean averages were used to examine differences in CQ levels between HR managers and university professors (*comparative analysis*). Results were presented clearly and accessibly in tables and in figures. The discussion contextualizes the findings within the broader literature on cultural intelligence, emphasizing implications for academia and HR management in Bulgaria.

Limitations of the study and ethical considerations

Current limitations of the study include a low response rate among HR managers and potential bias due to self-reported data. Data collection approach complied with ethical guidelines ensuring: diverse representation across organizational affiliations, voluntary and anonymous participation, informed consent, confidentiality of participants and strict adherence to ethical research standards. Methodology represents a holistic approach to examining CQ and its implications for Bulgarian organizational and educational contexts. The validity of the model is confirmed through the use of an established CQ measurement tool, statistical robustness and methodological rigor, and also in harmonization with ethical guidelines.

Results and discussions

The first question addresses occasions on being abroad and represents the most typical cases for professors and HR experts (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of answers to the question: On what occasion have you been abroad?

Answers	Distribution
Participation in an international conference, congress or symposium	63,4%
Teaching mobility under the Erasmus program	52,3%
Fulbright program specialization	1,7%
Business trip for a different purpose	45,6%
Travelling on a personal occasion (e.g. on a holiday)	84,8%
I haven't been abroad	1,2%

HR experts	Distribution
Participation in an international conference, congress or symposium	44%
Student mobility under the Erasmus program	39,8%
Professional training/ specialization	28%
Business trip for a different purpose	56%
Participation in an international project	51,8%
Travelling on a personal occasion (e.g. on a holiday)	95,4%
I haven't been abroad	0%

* Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents gave more than one answer.
Source: Author's own research.

We can see that both groups of participants have had significant international experience. While academics tend to travel mostly for international conferences, Erasmus teaching mobilities and tourism, HR experts prefer to visit international projects, go on business trips for other purposes and improve their skills in professional trainings. They also travel more on tourism than academics. This shows a **richer array of cross-cultural experiences among recruiters**. The author expects this will influence their CQ levels too.

Table 2. Distribution of answers to the question:
Have you had communication difficulties in your contact with foreigners?

	Yes	No	I don't know	Frequency Total
Academics	17,6 %	74,8 %	7,6 %	455
HR experts	46,4 %	47,7 %	5,9 %	118

Source: Author's own research.

The results in Table 2 show whether the two groups of participants experience communication challenges when interacting with foreigners. The responses are categorized as **Yes**, **No**, and **I don't know** options, and the frequency totals for each group are included. We observed that only 17.6% of Bulgarian academics reported experiencing such communication difficulties while a much higher proportion (46.4%) of recruiters admitted to facing them. This suggests that **HR professionals may encounter more communication barriers than academics, possibly due to less training in cross-cultural communication or different contexts of interaction** (e.g., negotiations, interviews or training settings) despite their greater travel experience. It also shows that **the majority of Bulgarian academics are either highly proficient in cross-cultural communication or their professional contexts prepare them well for such interactions**.

Another difference is demonstrated in the significant percentage of academics – 74.8%, who claim they don't have communication difficulties, probably due to their frequent participation in international academic events. Only 47.7% of HR experts reported they didn't have communication difficulties, showing a relatively lower level of confidence or preparedness in cross-cultural communication compared to academics. In addition, this might mean that recruiters are more self-aware of their self-efficacy during international contacts.

The proportion of uncertainty, with 7.6% of academics and 5.9% of HR experts claiming to not know, shows that **most respondents were confident in their self-assessment of their own cross-cultural communication experiences**. On the other hand, the larger sample size for academics (455) compared to HR experts (118) may influence the observed patterns, as a *more*

diverse and larger group of recruiters might exhibit different trends. Overall, **the data reveals a stark contrast** between academics' and HR experts' communication difficulties.

Table 3 presents data with a breakdown of the specific types of communication difficulties experienced by Bulgarian academics and HR experts.

Table 3. Distribution of answers to questions related to communication difficulties with foreigners

Statements for Bulgarian academics	Answers
I haven't had any difficulties	55,1 %
Yes, in the language barrier	13,8 %
Yes, in value differences	1,4 %
Yes, in non-verbal communication	0,7 %
Yes, in the teacher-student relationship	1 %
I haven't taught foreign students	28 %
Total	100 %

Statements for Bulgarian HR experts	Percent
I haven't had any difficulties	44 %
Yes, in the language barrier	32 %
Yes, in value differences	16 %
Yes, in non-verbal communication	0,01%
Yes, in the relationship between foreign team-members	8 %
I haven't worked with foreigners yet	0,03%
Total	100 %

Source: Author's own research.

The majority of academics (55,1%) reported *no communication difficulties*, as in strong cross-cultural competence or experience. 44% of HR experts admitted to not having difficulties suggesting that they face more frequent challenges in cross-cultural settings compared to academics. There is a significant difference between reported *language barrier difficulties* with HR experts experiencing such *about 2,3 times more often than academics*. This means that **there is a demand for foreign language training tailored to HR professionals' needs**. The biggest difference is shown in the responses to *value differences* – here HR experts demonstrate a considerably higher proportion (16%) than academics (1.4%). This may stem from cultural mismatches in workplace norms and practices. **The issue deserves attention because it shows that cultural sensitivity trainings for HR experts are acutely necessary for Bulgarian companies.**

In *non-verbal communication* both groups face insignificant issues, while the context specific challenges draw a second big difference between the group. This time 28% of the academics show no experience in teaching foreign students, revealing a **gap in exposure to culturally diverse classrooms for a significant portion of respondents**. 8% of HR professionals reported **challenges in relationships between foreign team members**, reflecting the complexity of managing cross-cultural teams, while only 0.03% had no experience working with people from other cultures. This shows there is a limited cross-cultural exposure only for a small subset of HR experts. Therefore, **potential for developing greater CQ among recruiters is promising.**

In conclusion, **HR experts could benefit from targeted training in language skills, value-based cultural awareness, and managing cross-cultural team dynamics.** Academics may need **support in teaching strategies for diverse classrooms.** Organizations and institutions

should consider implementing structured cultural intelligence programs to address language barriers, value-based conflicts, and non-verbal communication skills. While academics generally report fewer challenges, HR professionals face more *substantial barriers*, particularly in language and value differences. These findings **prove the need for role-specific interventions** to improve cultural intelligence in both academic and corporate environments.

The next table (4) presents the average values of all 20 CQ components by group – academics and HR experts, with component mean averages in each row and total averages at the bottom of the table. Figure 1 shows the distribution of values.

Table 4. Mean values of CQ components in both groups of respondents

Codes	Academics	HR experts	Component Mean Av.
MC1	6,08	6,01	6,045
MC2	6,03	6,20	6,115
MC3	5,94	5,77	5,855
MC4	5,93	5,81	5,87
COG1	4,31	4,10	4,205
COG2	5,29	4,83	5,06
COG3	5,21	5,23	5,22
COG4	4,42	4,11	4,265
COG5	4,76	5,02	4,89
COG6	4,61	4,83	4,72
MOT1	6,15	6,34	6,245
MOT2	5,42	5,48	5,45
MOT3	5,38	5,36	5,37
MOT4	4,59	4,74	4,665
MOT5	5,72	5,45	5,585
BEH1	5,47	5,69	5,58
BEH2	5,14	5,60	5,37
BEH3	5,54	5,77	5,655
BEH4	5,53	5,67	5,6
BEH5	5,27	5,62	5,445
Total Mean Av.	5,3395	5,3815	5,3605

Source: Author's own research.

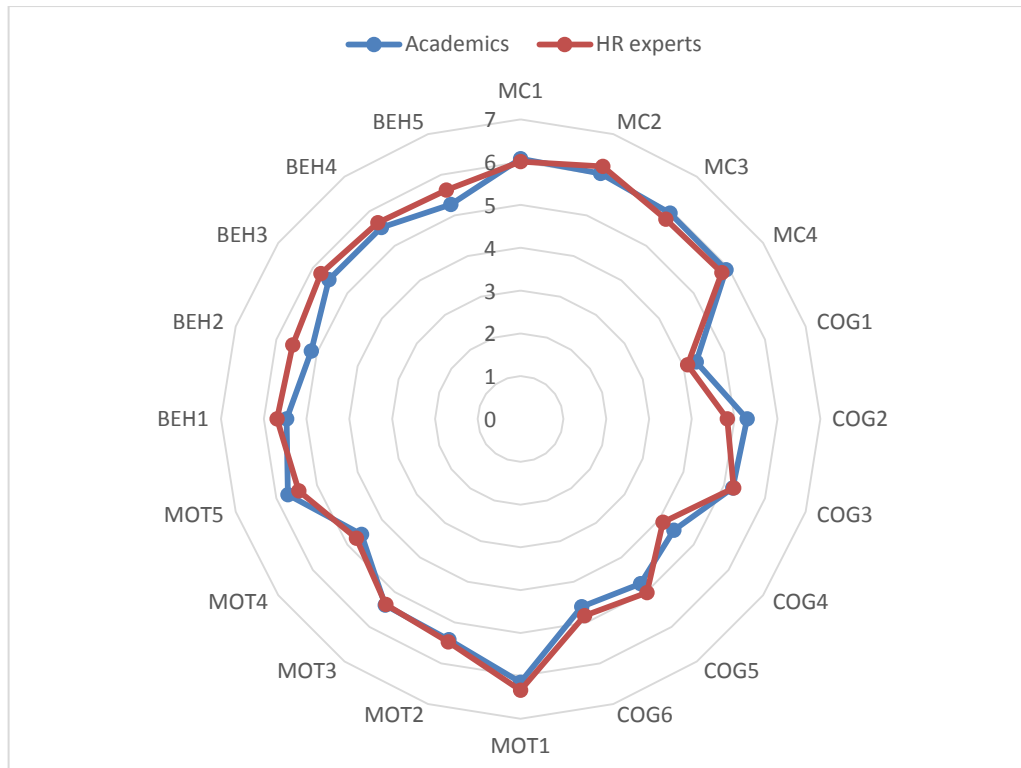


Figure 1. Distribution of values of CQ components in both groups of respondents

Source: Author's own research.

The calculated values show a slight difference between the groups. First, Bulgarian academics generally exhibit higher metacognitive CQ (6.00) than HR experts, which is due to their frequent engagement with diverse academic audiences. Second, academics generally outperform HR experts in most cognitive components (COG1, COG2, COG4), which could be explained by their roles requiring theoretical understanding of culture. HR experts perform better in COG5 (5.02 vs. 4.76) and COG6 (4.83 vs. 4.61), reflecting **practical knowledge tied to workplace interactions**. Third, HR experts perform better than academics in motivational components overall, with the exception of MOT5. This reflects their **higher confidence and enthusiasm for cross-cultural interactions**. It could be linked to their professional need to recruit and integrate diverse candidates. Fourth, **HR experts consistently outperform academics in all behavioral components**, indicating their ability to flexibly adjust behaviors in diverse interactions - a key skill in human resource management. In conclusion, both groups demonstrate strong motivation and perform well in metacognitive CQ components.

The next table (5) provides a comparison between the professional experience of Bulgarian academics and HR experts, categorized by years of experience. The percentages for each group show the distribution across five experience brackets, ranging from "up to 5 years" to "more than 20 years."

Table 5. Professional experience of respondents

Years of experience	Academics	HR experts
up to 5 years	11,9 %	15,2 %
between 6 and 10 years	12,6 %	24,6 %
between 11 and 15 years	20,4 %	28,8 %
between 16 and 20 years	15,7 %	4,2 %
more than 20 years	39,4 %	27,2 %
Total	100,0 %	100,0 %

Source: Author's own research.

The distribution leans toward academics with more than 20 years of experience, while HR experts demonstrate more balanced distribution with a peak in the 11–15 years range. A possible explanation could be the long-term nature of academic careers in comparison to greater mid-career prominence and less late-career retention in human resources in Bulgaria. Mid-career distribution deserves attention because among academics it comprises 33%, while HR experts' is significantly larger – 53,4%. Late career professionals (16+ years) show similar differences in distribution: 55,1% of academics fall into this category in comparison to 31,4% of HR experts. This shows differences in professional longevity which could determine the speed of intercultural learning. **HR experts might need to develop their cultural intelligence faster because of their shorter career duration (high career turnover in private companies) than academics (long tenure) and the dynamism of personnel management in private sector.**

Table 6 presents the *correlations between recruiters' professional experience and CQ components*. The table contains Pearson correlation coefficients, with a sample size of n=118, and significance levels between professional experience and the four dimensions of CQ.

Table 6. Correlations between professional experience of HR experts and CQ components

<i>Pearson's Correlations</i>					
			n	Pearson's r	p
MC	-	COG	118	0.648***	< .001
MC	-	MOT	118	0.450***	< .001
MC	-	BEH	118	0.669***	< .001
MC	-	HR Professional experience	118	-0.131	0.157
COG	-	MOT	118	0.191*	0.039
COG	-	BEH	118	0.660***	< .001
COG	-	HR Professional experience	118	-0.060	0.522
MOT	-	BEH	118	0.206*	0.025
MOT	-	HR Professional experience	118	-0.039	0.679
BEH	-	HR Professional experience	118	-0.097	0.298
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001					

Source: Author's own research.

There are strong positive correlations between MC and COG, MC and BEH, and COG and BEH which means that **recruiters with higher metacognition can transfer the skill into fact-based knowledge of cultural norms and the necessary behavioural changes to address them.** This shows **cultural self-efficacy depends on all three components working in synergy.** Moderate positive correlations are present between MC and MOT and MOT and BEH, indicating

that **recruiters capable of reflection on their intercultural experiences and more motivated to improve themselves, and more likely to adapt their behaviours to intercultural situations.**

Finally, the results show a *weak correlation between professional experience and CQ components*. This means that **professional experience is not directly associated with higher CQ** and suggests other factors might be more important, e.g., specific training or personal characteristics. Motivation's and metacognition's roles are more important in developing cultural sensitivity and self-efficacy. Targeted training in metacognitive and motivational CQ are recommendable solutions to increase intercultural competence among HR professionals.

Hypotheses' assessment

Results of the study show whether the hypotheses are confirmed or rejected:

For H1: *There is no significant difference between levels of communication difficulties among Bulgarian HR managers and university professors* – results show that **the first hypothesis is confirmed**. Both professional groups are very close in the CQ coefficients.

For H2: *There is a significant difference in the overall CQ levels between Bulgarian HR managers and university professors, with the metacognitive and motivational CQ dimensions bearing the largest difference* – analysis shows that overall differences in CQ levels are small, indicating a slightly larger difference between MC and MOT components. However, the difference is insignificant in the context of all components. Therefore, **the second hypothesis is rejected**.

For H3: *There are correlations between CQ and professional experience of Bulgarian HR experts* – results show that CQ components correlate with each other, but not with professional experience. This means that **third hypothesis is rejected**.

Conclusion

Cultural sensitivity is truly important for successful organizational dynamics in Bulgaria. The country is gathering experience in integrating CQ into leadership, employee training, and organizational policies, but these are still baby steps. There is a lot of potential to enhance employee performance and build diverse sustainable communities in higher education.

Bulgarian corporate and academic cultures are unique in their multicultural duality, integrating the cultural spaces of East and West. It is an interplay of traditional values and modern innovations. While Bulgarian SMEs focus on adaptability and innovation-driven practices, universities emphasize collaboration and global integration. Both sectors are coping with challenges in carrying out cross-cultural strategies effectively. The small but ongoing efforts in multicultural training and stakeholder engagement may offer a horizon for development.

In summary of the results of the study, we examined the cultural intelligence (CQ) levels of Bulgarian HR experts and university professors, while exploring the differences across CQ components, with the goals to assess the correlation between professional experience and intercultural competence. The findings provide valuable insights for people interested in cultural intelligence or those who are wishing to implement a DEI strategy in their organization.

First, international exposure is critical for well-developed intercultural communicative and behavioural competence. Both groups of professionals have similar significant international experience, which is mirrored in the coefficients of their CQ components. This fact emphasizes that organizations and policy-makers need to invest (or keep investing) in international travels and trainings for professionals. Higher degree of international exposure reduces communication challenges.

Second, the CQ component differences between the groups stand out – Bulgarian academics exhibited stronger cognitive CQ (understanding of cultural systems and theoretical knowledge of diversity), while HR experts presented higher motivational and behavioral CQ, reflecting their engagement with diverse employees and practical adaptability in cross-cultural settings. We see how each group has role-specific strengths, which means there should be emphasis on tailored training – in cognitive CQ for HR experts and in behavioral CQ for academics.

Third, the study found that duration of professional experience in itself does not matter for intercultural competence. What matters is higher intercultural metacognition and the motivation to experience the unknown via cross-cultural contacts and targeted training. Personality traits and personal values also play a big role.

In summary of the above-mentioned, future research and training directions may include the following:

- a. establishing a structured cultural intelligence training in both academia and HR practice, with specialized CQ component-based trainings to address specific needs;
- b. carrying out longitudinal studies to determine changes in CQ over time;
- c. carrying out comparative research in other national contexts to provide a broader cross-cultural perspective on the role of experience and professional background in shaping CQ;
- d. conducting new research, including (qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews and case studies) to examine personality traits, language proficiency, and exposure to multicultural teams as potential moderators of CQ development among Bulgarian professionals.

The study contributes to cultural intelligence research because it highlights that necessity for such competence is inevitable in current professional environments. Academics and HR experts might seem different at surface level but their intercultural self-efficacy is very similar. The study also refuted a popular myth – that Bulgarian HR professionals are close-minded and aren't truly open to cultural differences in comparison to their colleagues from academia and education as a whole. As an aftermath, the author proposes more open-mindedness both among researchers and policy-makers to address the complicated issues of the future – building and finding a competent workforce in an increasingly globalizing world, with consistent reductions in population-size and growing anti-diversity attitudes.

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Appendix

Statements for measuring cultural intelligence (CQS) and their codes used to represent the results of the study

Code	Metacognitive CQ components
MC1	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.
MC2	I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me.
MC3	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions.
MC4	I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures.
Code	Cognitive CQ components
COG1	I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures.
COG2	I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages.
COG3	I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.
COG4	I know the marriage systems of other cultures.
COG5	I know the arts and crafts of other cultures.
COG6	I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.
Code	Motivational CQ components
MOT1	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
MOT2	I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.
MOT3	I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.
MOT4	I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.
MOT5	I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture.
Code	Behavioral CQ components
BEH1	I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.
BEH2	I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.
BEH3	I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.
BEH4	I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.
BEH5	I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

Source: Adapted from Ang, et al. (Ang, et al., 2007).