



FEDERAL UNIVERSITY  
OF CEARÁ

ISSN 1678-2089  
ISSNe 2178-9258

[www.periodicos.ufc.br/contextus](http://www.periodicos.ufc.br/contextus)

## Cultural intelligence, international experience and early internationalization: An essay on connecting constructs

*Inteligência cultural, experiência internacional e internacionalização precoce: Um ensaio sobre a conexão dos construtos*

*Inteligencia cultural, experiencia internacional e internacionalización temprana: Un ensayo sobre la conexión de constructos*

<https://doi.org/10.19094/contextus.2022.72806>

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss how the constructs of international experience, cultural intelligence, and early internationalization are connected, according to their respective theoretical perspectives. The international business literature has not addressed how managers' international experience generates cultural intelligence and drives early internationalization, considering aspects of the entrepreneur and the organization. It is observed that the international experience results in three characteristics: cultural knowledge, cultural skills, and metacognition. The manager's characteristics can be incorporated into the proposed model, demonstrating the connection between international experience, cultural intelligence, and early internationalization. They encompass the manager's international orientation, faster recognition of international opportunities, and faster internationalization.

**Keywords:** cultural intelligence; international experience; early internationalization; theoretical perspectives; manager's characteristics.

### RESUMO

O presente artigo tem o objetivo de discutir como os construtos experiência internacional, inteligência cultural e internacionalização precoce estão conectados, conforme as respectivas perspectivas teóricas. O entendimento de como a experiência internacional dos gestores gera inteligência cultural e impulsiona a internacionalização precoce não foi abordado pela literatura de negócios internacionais, considerando aspectos do empreendedor e da organização. Observa-se que a experiência internacional resulta em três características: o conhecimento cultural, habilidades culturais e metacognição. As características do gestor podem ser incorporadas ao modelo proposto, demonstrando a conexão entre experiência internacional, inteligência cultural e internacionalização precoce, pois englobam a orientação internacional do gestor, reconhecimento mais rápido das oportunidades internacionais e uma internacionalização mais acelerada.

**Palavras-chave:** inteligência cultural; experiência internacional; internacionalização precoce; perspectivas teóricas; características do gestor.

### RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo discutir cómo se conectan los constructos experiencia internacional, inteligencia cultural e internacionalización temprana, según sus respectivas perspectivas teóricas. Comprender cómo la experiencia internacional de los gerentes genera inteligencia cultural e impulsa la internacionalización temprana no ha sido abordado por la literatura de negocios internacionales, considerando aspectos del emprendedor y la organización. Se observa que la experiencia internacional resulta en tres características: conocimiento cultural, habilidades culturales y metacognición. Las características del gerente pueden incorporarse al modelo propuesto, demostrando la conexión entre la experiencia internacional, la inteligencia cultural y la internacionalización temprana, ya que abarcan la orientación internacional del gerente, un reconocimiento más rápido de las oportunidades internacionales y una internacionalización más rápida.

**Palabras clave:** inteligencia cultural; experiencia internacional; internacionalización temprana; perspectivas teóricas; características del gerente.

### How to cite this article:

Roecker, R., & Floriani, D. E. (2022). Cultural intelligence, international experience and early internationalization: An essay on connecting constructs. *Contextus – Contemporary Journal of Economics and Management*, 20(9), 112-124. <https://doi.org/10.19094/contextus.2022.72806>

### Article Information

Uploaded on 24/11/2021

Final version on 04/02/2022

Accepted on 12/02/2022

Published online on 03/05/2022

Interinstitutional Scientific Committee

Editor-in-chief: Diego de Queiroz Machado

Assistant Editor: Márcia Zabdiele Moreira

Evaluation by the double blind review system

(SEER / OJS - version 3)



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Early internationalization, especially among new companies, has become an essential topic in international business and entrepreneurship (Baier-Fuentes et al., 2019). Although there is some consensus on the factors that could determine and enable rapid internationalization, some gaps remain in the existing literature. First, a more systematic approach is needed to expand empirical studies, gradually incorporating theoretical ideas from other fields, in order to increase knowledge about International Entrepreneurship, adding new variables and relationships to understand better the phenomena of entrepreneurship (Federico et al., 2009; Amorós et al., 2016).

Previous studies on International Entrepreneurship have highlighted the critical role of entrepreneurs in explaining why companies adopt a rapid internationalization strategy (Baier-Fuentes et al., 2019). Human capital is often associated with the success of new companies, as this type of intangible asset allows managers to explore business opportunities that are outside national borders (Manolova et al., 2002; Autio, 2005; Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005; Federico et al., 2009; Baier-Fuentes et al., 2019). In this way, previous experiences of managers (especially international ones) become relevant. The experiences affect the results of rapid internationalization, as they compensate for the lack of organizational experience in the internationalization process. Experience provides cumulative knowledge for managers, business contacts, and entrepreneurial skills (Federico et al., 2009; Baier-Fuentes et al., 2019).

Furthermore, international experience is often and intuitively used as a key construct to explain the development of cultural intelligence (CQ), which refers to an individual's abilities to interact constructively and effectively in culturally diverse situations. (Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas et al., 2008). Cultural intelligence has been shown to positively impact a range of intercultural interaction outcomes (Fang, Schei & Selart, 2018; Ott & Michailova, 2018). Through their interaction facets, individuals have the appropriate knowledge, the skills to process knowledge, and the behaviors to portray the knowledge and interact with culturally different others in constructive ways (Michailova & Ott, 2018).

As a second gap, there is a need to have a measure that expresses how the international experience of managers can facilitate the phenomenon of early internationalization (Schueffel, Amann & Herbolzheimer, 2011). With the growing importance of managers' international experience in the internationalization process, studies still need to gain more insights into its conceptualization and effect on company results (Le & Kroll, 2017). Although quantitative measures such as the amount of time and number of international incursions have been consistently used in previous research, they

may be insufficient to capture the multifaceted construct of international experience (Takeuchi, Wang & Marinova, 2005; Le & Kroll, 2017).

Researchers have long suggested that international experience consists of several components, such as the type of experience – work or non-work (Takeuchi, Wang & Marinova, 2005). Also, languages learned (Church, 1982; Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas et al., 2008) and even international experiences in the country of origin, such as intercultural training or contact with foreigners (Thomas et al., 2008). The results of this experience for the company are determined not only by characteristics of individuals but also by the interactions between these components (Quin'Ones et al., 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998; Le & Kroll, 2017). The cultural intelligence coefficient can fill this gap, linking the components of international experience. A latent construct predicts the interaction between its facets – knowledge, skills, and cognition – to create culturally influential behavior. Furthermore, the cultural intelligence coefficient is a validated way of measuring an individual's ability to deal with multicultural contexts.

Finally, Kahn and Lew (2018) point out the lack of empirical studies that address how managerial experience influences the growth and survival of companies internationally. Human capital is often associated with the success of new companies, as this type of intangible asset allows managers to explore business opportunities outside national borders (Manolova et al., 2002; Autio, 2005; Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005). In this way, previous experiences of managers (especially international ones) become relevant. Previous experiences can affect the results of rapid internationalization, as they compensate for the lack of organizational experience in the internationalization process.

The experience provides a sum of knowledge, business contacts, and entrepreneurial skills to managers (Federico et al., 2009; Baier-Fuentes et al., 2019). This argument reinforces the idea of applying the cultural intelligence coefficient in the analysis of the influence of managers' international experience on the speed of the internationalization process since a growing body of empirical evidence suggests that the cultural intelligence coefficient predicts and explains organizational behaviors, attitudes, and performance (Schlaegel, Richter & Taras, 2017; Taras, 2020). To date, existing research has predominantly focused on the benefit of CQ at the individual and team levels (Liao & Thomas, 2020). There is evidence that CQ is a good predictor for individuals' effectiveness in cross-cultural decision making, judgment, adaptation, and performance (Chen et al., 2011; Imai & Gelfand, 2010; Kim & Van Dyne, 2012; Charoensukmongkol, 2015; ). One can predict the contribution of CQ to international performance at the firm level. In particular, there is a need to integrate the concept of CQ at the individual level into organizational outcomes as this connection remains poorly researched (Ang &

Inkpen, 2008; Charoensukmongkol, 2015; Liao & Thomas, 2020).

In this sense, the relationship between international experience and cultural intelligence has not yet been analyzed in companies with early internationalization. Understanding how cultural intelligence can boost the speed of companies' internationalization is an issue to be explored. Demonstrating that the international experience of managers can generate cultural intelligence, boosting the speed of internationalization is a reflection exercise developed in this article, which can result in benefits for the academic community and business managers.

The present work correlates theoretical perspectives on cultural intelligence, international experience, and early internationalization. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on international business (IB) and International Entrepreneurship, as it seeks to:

1. advance the empirical understanding of the manager, adding the relationship between Cultural Intelligence and early internationalization,
2. explore a coefficient (CQ) that can represent the interaction between the components of the managers' international experience (IE), and
3. Discuss how international managerial experience drives and differentiates the speed of internationalization of companies.

The article is divided as follows: first, international experience demonstrates its connection with cultural intelligence. Subsequently, the concept, dimensions, and ways of measuring the cultural intelligence coefficient (CQ) are exposed. In the third moment, elements are brought about early internationalization and its motivations. Finally, it is discussed how cultural intelligence can serve as a measure for the international experience of managers as a driver of the speed of internationalization, presenting the propositions elaborated in this study and the final considerations.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

International Experience (IE) refers to exposure to a foreign region, including encounters with members of different cultures, which help people become familiar with and understand other cultures' norms, values, and beliefs (Engle & Crowne, 2014). International experiences can range from short visits to other countries to long-term immersion experiences in a new culture (Li et al., 2013). International experiences are said to include meaningful interactions with natives of the foreign culture, through which individuals develop structures of specific knowledge about another culture (Church, 1982; Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas et al., 2008; Michailova & Ang, 2003; Ott, 2018; Ott & Iskhakova, 2019).

In international business (IB) studies, the individual's international experience has been explored in

several aspects. Takeuchi, Wang, and Marinova (2005) developed a framework that considers the multidimensional nature of the IE construct. According to the authors, it is necessary to consider the particular domain of experience and differentiate between work-related and non-work-related experiences. International professional experiences develop work-related knowledge and skills, limiting the influence of these experiences because the individual's primary care is focused on this domain (Moon, 2012). Non-work experiences, on the other hand, provide opportunities for interaction with the natives of the visited country, gaining specific knowledge of the general culture, and developing comprehensive cultural frameworks of reference (Moon, 2012; Takeuchi, Wang & Marinova, 2005; Michailova & Ott, 2018; Ott & Iskhakova, 2019). Non-work-related experiences include vacations, education abroad, and language study (Crowne, 2008; Moon, 2012; Michailova & Ott, 2018; Ott & Iskhakova, 2019), while work-related experiences are international assignments and short business trips. (Moon, 2012; Michailova & Ott, 2018; Ott & Iskhakova, 2019).

It is also recommended that when approaching IE, the time dimension is also recognized (Goodman et al., 2001; Takeuchi, Wang & Marinova, 2005; Michailova & Ott, 2018). IE can refer to experiences that have occurred in the past, experiences that are occurring, or experiences that will occur in the future, making it essential to differentiate between them (Michailova & Ott, 2018). Finally, when investigating past experiences, Takeuchi, Wang, and Marinova (2005) further differentiate these experiences, identifying them as specific to the country in which the international attribution takes place or not. The authors conclude that individuals who had previous experience in a country similar to their current international assignments reported a better fit. Those who had no experience in a similar country reported a weaker fit.

IE, at the individual level, is routinely included in adjustment models for foreigners and expatriates (Church, 1982; Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Moon, 2012; Selmer, 2002; Takeuchi, Wang & Marinova, 2005; Michailova & Ott, 2018; Ott & Iskhakova, 2019). When individuals are exposed to other cultures, they gain essential information about the culture and develop processes to deal with cultural differences and form accurate expectations of other cultures (Church, 1982). These past experiences, based on the notion of uncertainty reduction, are discussed to help the individual adjust (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). Empirical research has shown that IE alleviates culture shock and leads to a better fit (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2011) and therefore is used as a criterion for making selection decisions for international papers (Caligiuri et al., 2009).

Bearing in mind that CQ is often reported to result from IE or exposure to other cultures (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas, 2006; Thomas et al., 2008).

Studies have found support for a positive relationship and significance between these two constructs (Crowne, 2008; Moon, Choi & Jung, 2012; Li, Mobley & Kelly, 2013; Kurpis and Hunter, 2017; Pekerti & Arli, 2017). IE provides a crucial and unique context that creates the opportunity for CQ learning and development (Fang, Schei & Selart, 2018). Therefore, IE is one of the most frequently examined predictors of CQ, with most previous research supporting a positive link between IE and CQ (Harrison, 2012; Moon, Choi & Jung, 2012; Pekerti & Arli, 2017; Ott & Iskhakova, 2019).

Researchers have examined different types of international experiences. Crowne (2008) distinguished between employment, education, vacation, and other types of experience. The study linked educational experience and work experience to the overall CQ. Kurpis and Hunter (2017) also found that experience gained from working or traveling abroad is positively correlated with all aspects of CQ, while intercultural knowledge gained through classes and studies has a positive link to crucial facets of CQ. Some authors, however, have focused on certain types of experience, such as expatriation (Moon, Choi & Jung, 2012) and immigration (Pekerti & Arli, 2017). Other researchers have also examined the depth of IE. For example, Crowne (2008) used the number of countries visited to measure the depth of experience and found that higher levels of cultural exposure increase CQ.

Li, Mobley, and Kelly (2013) found that experience abroad is positively correlated with CQ, and the relationship is strengthened when participants have a learning style that emphasizes concrete experience and observation. Story et al. (2014) studied global leaders of recognized multinational corporations. They revealed that the frequency of business trips abroad and the amount of time living abroad was positively related to the global mind.

The assumption underlying these studies is that as people experience cultural differences and learn about different customs, behaviors, and values when traveling or living abroad, they become culturally intelligent (Liao & Thomas, 2020). During an IE, individuals have the opportunity to develop culture-specific information. However, they can also develop skills to deal with being in other cultures and dealing with the tensions associated with being in a new and different environment (Michailova & Ott, 2018). ). An IE can help facilitate an individual's understanding of what it means to be in another culture with full effects of generalization or non-culture-specific learning (Bell & Harrison, 1996). Through international experiences, individuals can develop the processes of "learning to learn another culture" (Bell & Harrison, 1996, p. 53). These skills can be generalized to other cultural experiences through cultural metacognition.

In the conceptual field, the theories used to support the link between IE and CQ are mainly Contact Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, and Social Learning Theory, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

Theories used in research on International Experience (IE) and Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Theories used in research on IE and CQ		
Theory	Authors/Year	Main Contributions
Social Learning Theory (SLT)	Crowne (2013)	Number of countries (breadth) and type of experience (depth) have a greater impact on CQ.
	Moon (2012)	Non-work-related international experiences are more important for expatriates' CQ development than work-related ones.
	Remhof et al. (2013)	International experiences and networks abroad have a positive effect on CQ.
	Tarique & Takeuchi (2008)	Different modes of international experience are important to understand your relationship with CQ.
	Michailova & Ott (2018)	SLT as a way to understand in greater detail the relationship between international experience and CQ development.
Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)	Li et al. (2013)	Divergent learning style strengthens the relationship between overseas experience and CQ development.
	Varela & Gatlin-Watts (2014)	International experience acts primarily on the cognitive components of CQ.
	Wood & St.Peters (2014)	Short-term study tours can be an effective way to increase CQ, but they need to be organized with a structured project.
Contact Theory	Chao et al. (2017)	The extent to which CQ is influenced by international experiences varies.
	Engle e Crowne (2014)	Structured short-term international experiences impact CQ.
	Kim e Van Dyne (2012)	Previous intercultural contact is a valuable criterion for selecting and training future international leaders.
SLT e ELT	MacNab e Worthley (2012)	International travel experiences do not have a significant relationship to CQ development.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Contact Theory was initially formulated in 1954 by Allport to understand the effects of interpersonal contact on intergroup dynamics, such as prejudice reduction and social integration (Michailova & Ott, 2018). This approach presents a process model, suggesting that optimal contact experiences evolve gradually and that initial contact plays a vital role in shaping subsequent experiences and intergroup outcomes (Pettigrew, 1998). Studies that focused on Contact Theory advanced the understanding of how changes in individuals' CQ occur in the context of international exchanges, that is, in international experiences.

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1984) addresses the development of adults, especially professionals. According to this approach, professional training is a permanent learning process until individuals can take ownership of their professional experience. In these studies, experiential encounters (interactions with people and situations from different cultures) are relevant to the development of cultural intelligence. They suggest that individual life and experience in other cultures could influence propensities for cultural intelligence (Macnab & Worthley, 2012). Predominantly, in research that addresses international experiences and CQ, the Social Learning Theory - SLT (Bandura, 1977) is used, including continuous and reciprocal interactions between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants. In training and development, SLT has been used to examine various skills and has been shown to be more coherent in explaining the development of these aspects than other approaches such as experiential learning (Michailova & Ott, 2018). The SLT argues that learning is governed by three central elements: attention, retention, and reproduction, which are influenced by motivation, incentives, and consequences. Attention processes are used to determine what is observed and what is extracted from exposure (Bandura, 1977). In retention processes, modeled behavior is encoded in memory as easily remembered schemata in symbolic form for later use through response retrieval and reproduction, which involves imaginal and verbal systems. The reproduction processes encompass symbolic representations and the conversion of the schema into appropriate action through the formation of the cognitive level and the self-correcting adjustment of the behavior (Michailova & Ott, 2018). Thus, in SLT, CQ is understood as a result of attention processes, while retention processes influence the development of CQ, and reproduction processes lead to the development of CQ (Michailova & Ott, 2018).

### 3 CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE (CQ)

Solving problems and adapting to different situations is traditionally seen as human intelligence. However, there are numerous and varied problems and circumstances to be faced, demanding individual solutions that go beyond cognitive issues and involve relational aspects (Lee &

Sukoco, 2010). The principle of the studies in which the investigation of man's ability to develop his abilities (cognitive and emotional) is found. Cultural diversity is contemplated in studies on human intelligence and the theory of multiple intelligences (Ang, Van Dyne & Koh, 2006).

The individual's ability to successfully adapt to new and unfamiliar cultural environments, along with their ability to function effectively in situations characterized by multiculturalism, is called Cultural Intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang et al., 2007). It has become the focus of a multidisciplinary academic research community since 2002. As an ability to interact effectively with individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds, CQ was initially described by Earley (2002). According to the author, people with high CQ possess motivational, cognitive, and metacognitive skills that can be used to interact and work with other culturally different individuals successfully. Furthermore, for Brislin et al. (2006), individuals with developed CQ can judge interactions or situations that encompass a new culture, different from their original culture, until they have deciphered environmental clues to understand the behavior of culturally different individuals.

Several studies were concerned with systematizing information from academic works that address Cultural Intelligence, such as by Ng et al. (2012), Ang and Van Dyne (2015), Ott and Michailova (2016). Fang, Schei, and Selart (2018) stand out for being integrative literature reviews and aim to bring the state of the art of research on CQ, reflections, and suggestions for ways to advance the science and practice of CQ. Still, in the qualitative approach, Andresen and Bergdolt (2017) bring a review to distinguish Global Mindset from Cultural Intelligence, while Michailova and Ott (2018) seek to integrate the academic production that deals with IE and CQ. In order to raise the accepted hypotheses in empirical studies, Solomon and Steyn (2017) carried out an integrative literature review to identify "the truths about CQ Validation tests and analyzes of CQ measurement instruments were also the subject of reviews (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013; Bücken, Furrer & Lin, 2015; Taras, 2020).

Richter (2020) present a study with bibliometric techniques addressing Cultural Intelligence, Global Mindset, and cultural competencies.2015; Taras, 2020). Also, Schlaegel, Richter, and Taras (2017) developed a meta-analysis on research that addressed expatriation and CQ. Yari, Lankut, Alon, and Richter (2020) present a study with bibliometric techniques addressing Cultural Intelligence, Global Mindset, and cultural competencies. In terms of conceptualization of the CQ, the authors presented here to call attention to the existence of two main currents of literature, that of Earley and Ang (2003) and that of Thomas et al. (2008), each with its respective measurement coefficient. The first authors conceived CQ as a multifaceted construct constituted by cognition (including metacognition), motivation, and behavior. Cognition captures an individual's knowledge of other

cultures. Behavior reflects an individual's ability to perform culturally competent behaviors, and motivation reflects an individual's willingness to practice that behavior. The conceptualization of Thomas et al. (2008) addresses cultural knowledge and cultural metacognition.

The authors highlight the role of metacognition in implementing culturally intelligent behaviors. Consequently, metacognition is the force that leads to the creation of culturally competent behavior and induces the translation of cultural knowledge into culturally apt behavior. Although there are similarities between the two concepts described, Thomas et al. (2008) criticized some of the characteristics of Earley and Ang's (2003) concept, particularly for being an aggregate construction. Thomas et al. (2012) distinguish their conceptualization of CQ as a latent construct, highlighting the crucial role of cultural metacognition and emphasizing the interaction between facets resulting in CQ. Based on the arguments of Law, Wong, and Mobley (1998), Thomas (2006) explains that a necessary condition of a well-defined multidimensional construction is that it specifies the relationships between dimensions and the general construction; otherwise, it will lose its usefulness. This specification is lacking in the conceptualization of Earley and Ang (2003) and later studies by Ang et al. (2007) and Ang and Van Dyne (2008). They place facets and the general construction on the same level and describe them as different types of capabilities that together form the construction of CQ (Van Dyne et al., 2008).

A second significant difference between the conceptualizations is related to the motivational facet. Earley and Ang (2003) describe this facet as the device that positively directs effort and energy to interact in culturally diverse situations. In contrast, Thomas et al. (2012) explain that being motivated for positive interactions is not a requirement for CQ. Although presented positively, motivation does not prevent highly culturally intelligent individuals from being negatively motivated. While motivation is willing to behave in a particular way, CQ can interact effectively (Thomas et al., 2015). Concerning its background, the CQ is theorized and developed from knowledge from various sociocultural contexts (Earley & Ang, 2003) and experience with culturally different individuals (Thomas et al., 2008). Therefore, it is assumed as a natural result of an experience in other cultures and educational interventions (Ott & Michailova, 2016; Fang, Schei & Selart, 2018; Taras, 2020). In this sense, CQ is often declared to result from IE or exposure to other cultures (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas, 2006; Thomas et al., 2008), a statement underlies the present essay.

#### 4 EARLY INTERNATIONALIZATION

In the literature on International Business (IB), the theory of International Entrepreneurship, included in the behavioral approach, is based on the figure of the

entrepreneur as a motivator and initiator of the company's internationalization process. It is the essential factor in the choice of entry modes, influencing, in a different way, in the process and international performance, reflecting the characteristics of individual entrepreneurship (Andersson, 2000). On the other hand, the rapid internationalization of startups (technology-based companies) has challenged traditional internationalization theories.

The fast internationalization has led researchers to investigate the sources and implications of this phenomenon (Mcdougall, Shane & Oviatt, 1994; Zahra & George, 2002). In particular, the behavior of new ventures that start internationalization soon after their creation requires closer examination (Sapienza et al., 2006). The Born Globals Theory addresses the internationalization process of these companies, which start their international activities soon after their emergence, simultaneously with the activities at the national level. This type of enterprise, due to its characteristics, does not require a gradual process before starting its international participation and presents what is called accelerated or early internationalization (Sapienza et al., 2006).

Studies that address the motivators of early internationalization bring the characteristics of the entrepreneur, or the manager at the forefront of the process, as critical factors in this phenomenon (Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005; Sapienza et al., 2006; Luo, Zhao & Du, 2005; Zucchella, Palamara & Denicolai, 2007; Acedo & Jones, 2007; Schueffel, Amann & Herbolzheimer, 2011; Kalinic & Forza, 2012; Chetty, Johanson & Martín, 2014; Jiang et al., 2020). The manager's IE can be understood as a motivator, that is, a force that drives early internationalization (Luo, Zhao & Du, 2005; Zucchella, Palamara & Denicolai, 2007; Acedo & Jones, 2007; Kalinic & Forza, 2012; Chetty, Johanson & Martín, 2014). In this way, the interpretation of international opportunities is related to the manager's entrepreneurial behavior and international orientation. Behavior and combination of education mastered languages, and experience abroad (Acedo & Jones, 2007).

In studies on early internationalization, IE can also be seen as a mediator of the speed of internationalization (Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005). It highlights the role of the entrepreneur, who can be the group or person responsible for perceiving international opportunities. Thus, companies where the entrepreneur has personal international experiences, show faster recognition of international opportunities and show faster internationalization and more outstanding commitment of resources (Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005). As a moderator (Sapienza et al., 2006; Schueffel, Amann & Herbolzheimer, 2011), managers' prior IE influences the speed of internationalization because it partially replaces the company's lack of experience with internationalization (Sapienza et al., 2006). In addition, previous experience of management members abroad facilitates the external expansion of the company, as

experience helps to minimize the time and resources spent on the learning and can positively influence the company's survival (Schueffel, Amann & Herbolzheimer). , 2011).

Although most studies that address early internationalization emphasize the manager's IE as a pillar of internationalization speed (Denicolai; Palamara & Zucchella, 2005; Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005; Barakat et al., 2015; Chetty, Johanson & Martin, 2014; De Cock et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2020), there is no consensus on how this experience can be measured. Schueffel, Amann, and Herbolzheimer (2011) call attention to the need to have a measure that expresses how managers' IE can facilitate the phenomenon of early internationalization.

The ratio between the number of nationalities represented on the board of directors of a group of companies surveyed board members and the result was used to proxy for managerial experience in internationalization and an attempt to develop a measure for managers' IE. It considers which is closely linked to individual experience since the extant literature on early internationalization indicates that prior management IE facilitates the early internationalization phenomenon (Schueffel, Amann & Herbolzheimer, 2011).

However, this measure may not capture the complete concept of IE at the individual level nor even represent an understanding of how IE affects the speed of internationalization, as it is one-dimensional and generic. Scholars have been able to identify a large number of factors at the individual manager level regarding a company's decision to establish activities abroad (Knight & Liesch, 2016; De Cock et al., 2020).

## **5 PREVIOUS INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE, CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND EARLY INTERNATIONALIZATION**

It is assumed that cultural intelligence refers to an individual's capabilities to interact effectively in culturally diverse situations (Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas et al., 2008). Moreover, CQ is formed by interacting 3 (three) dimensions: cultural knowledge and intercultural skills linked by cultural metacognition (Thomas et al., 2015). Cultural knowledge is composed of Declarative Knowledge (of specific content) and Procedural Knowledge. Specific content knowledge is factual knowledge through which the existence of different cultures is perceived, and the nature of these cultures is defined. It comprises concepts, raw data, and information, which can be accumulated. This knowledge allows an individual to navigate culture and understand its internal logic. Procedural knowledge refers to interactions, cross-cultural encounters, and how problems are resolved within these encounters. By learning from this interaction with others, an individual can reach higher levels of understanding and complexity within the culture they are relating to (Thomas et al., 2015).

Regarding cultural skills, Thomas et al. (2015) predict 5 (five) categories of skills: uncertainty tolerance,

adaptability, empathy, relationship skills, and perception accuracy. Demonstrating cultural intelligence requires learning from social experiences, appreciation of differences and variations in cultures, successful relationships with others, and finally, the ability to adapt behavior to specific situations (Thomas et al., 2015). The authors also report that metacognition is the perception of how an individual acquires knowledge, the mechanisms that each individual uses to check their learning, and is the central concept of cultural intelligence. Moreover, they complement, informing that in intercultural interaction, the elements of the process are: recognition or awareness of the interaction, analysis of the interaction, analysis of information about the interaction, allocation of mental resources to monitor the problem/solution of the problem, until it can evaluate the solution found and decide whether this solution can be used in other cultural interactions (Thomas et al., 2015).

IE is the primary antecedent characteristic of CQ. If this IE is also considered the main factor when analyzing the characteristics of the entrepreneur within the scope of the drivers of the speed of internationalization (Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005; Sapienza et al., 2006; Luo, Zhao, Du, 2005; Zucchella, Palamara, Denicolai, 2007; Acedo, Jones, 2007; Schueffel, Amann & Herbolzheimer, 2011; Kalinic, Forza, 2012; Chetty, Johanson, Martín, 2014). It is assumed that the intelligence coefficient culture (CQ) can measure managers' IE. The CQ is formed by international experiences and other factors that change the mentality of individuals and qualify them to operate with cultural idiosyncrasies (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2008).

In this context, it is accepted that managers' IE impacts the speed with which a company internationalizes. Companies whose founders have foreign professional experience (Bloodgood et al., 1996; Oviatt & Mcdougall, 1994) or educated abroad (Bloodgood et al., 1996; Reuber & Fischer, 1997) are more likely to have an early internationalization. Manager's IE can reduce managerial perceptions about the risk and uncertainty inherent in internationalization. Since prior international knowledge accelerates the decision to internationalize (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2006; Jandhyala, 2013; Knight & Liesch, 2016; De Cock et al. al., 2020).

It is eminent to consider that not all managers who internationalize early have the same degree of IE. When focusing on Born Globals, entrepreneurial startups that, since or close to their founding, managers have sought to obtain a substantial proportion of their revenue from selling products in international markets (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

One sees that many of them are founded by individuals with substantial prior IE, either from personal or work experiences (Acedo & Jones, 2007; Aspelund et al., 2007; Hewerdine & Welch, 2013; Luostarinen & Gabrielsson, 2006; Mcdougall et al., 2007; Hewerdine & Welch, 2013; Luostarinen & Gabrielsson, 2006; Mcdougall

et al. al., 2003; Weerawardena et al., 2007). At the same time, however, a substantial proportion of Born Globals have little or no international business experience (Freeman et al., 2006; Knight & Liesch, 2016; De Cock et al., 2020). How do managers' IE affect the internationalization of enterprises that decide to move abroad?

This issue may lie in understanding how IE and manager characteristics are analyzed. Although quantitative measures, such as the amount of time and number of international incursions, have been frequently used in previous research, they may be insufficient to capture the multifaceted IE construct (Takeuchi, Wang & Marinova, 2005; Le & Kroll, 2017). Researchers have long suggested that IE consists of several components, beyond simply time spent abroad, and the results of this experience for the company are determined not only by individual characteristics but also by the interactions between these components (Quin'Ones et al. al., 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998; Le & Kroll, 2017). The cultural intelligence coefficient can fill this gap, linking the components of IE, as it is a latent construct that predicts the interaction between its facets. – knowledge, skills, and cognition – to create culturally influential behavior.

It is possible to link aspects of individuals' international experiences with the dimensions of CQ as follows. During an IE, individuals have the opportunity to

develop culture-specific information. However, they can also develop skills to deal with being in other cultures and dealing with the tensions associated with being in a new and different environment. IE can facilitate the individual's understanding of the meaning of another culture, bringing complete generalization or non-culture-specific learning effects (Bell & Harrison, 1996; Michailova & Ott, 2018). Through international experiences, individuals can develop the processes of "learning to learn another culture" (Bell & Harrison, 1996; Michailova & Ott, 2018). These skills can be generalized to other cultural experiences through cultural metacognition. Thus, the knowledge and skills dimensions of CQ are developed when individuals obtain information about cultures (both similarities and differences) and learn the capacities to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Thomas et al., 2008). Considering that previous international experiences are a criterion that additionally develops cultural intelligence (CQ), it will contribute to the understanding of how managers can become more culturally prepared, recognizing new opportunities more quickly and, consequently, taking the organizations to internationalize faster.

Table 2 illustrates the relationships pointed out by the propositions as a model resulting from the theoretical discussion of this theoretical essay.

**Table 2**

Aspects of international experience (IE) that contribute to the formation of cultural intelligence (CQ) and drive early internationalization.

International Experience	Cultural Intelligence	Early Internationalization
Develop culture-specific information.	Cultural knowledge (declarative and procedural).	Manager characteristics (level of education, languages and experience abroad).
Develop skills to deal with being in other cultures and dealing with tensions associated with being in a new and different environment.	Cultural skills (uncertainty tolerance, adaptability, empathy, relationship skills and perception).	Faster recognition of international opportunities.
"Learning to learn another culture".	Cultural metacognition (recognition or awareness of interaction).	Faster internationalization with greater commitment of resources.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As a result of the literature discussion, we have the following propositions:

- P1) The cultural intelligence coefficient can represent the link between the components that involve the multifaceted construct of previous IE, allowing a better understanding of its implications in the process of internationalization of companies;
- P2) A higher manager's cultural intelligence coefficient will drive early internationalization, given that this characteristic results in faster recognition, selection, and exploitation of international opportunities.

**6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The present theoretical essay discussed how cultural intelligence, international experience, and early

internationalization could be connected. From the survey of studies already carried out, it was observed that IE results in three main characteristics:

1. developing culture-specific information,
2. developing skills to deal with the fact of being in other cultures,
3. dealing with the tensions associated with being in an environment new and different (Michailova & Ott, 2018).

Each of these characteristics can be correlated, respectively, to the 3 (three) dimensions that make up cultural intelligence, which is, according to Thomas et al. (2015): cultural knowledge (composed of Declarative Knowledge and Procedural Knowledge); cultural skills (Thomas et al. (2015) predict 5 (five) categories of skills: uncertainty tolerance, adaptability, empathy, relationship skills and perception accuracy; and metacognition (perception of how an individual acquires knowledge, the

mechanisms that each individual uses to check their learning and is the central concept of cultural intelligence).

In the same sense, the manager's characteristics on the speed of internationalization can also be related to the model (Table 2). The characteristics encompass the manager's international orientation (level of education, languages spoken, and experience abroad) (Acedo & Jones, 2007), faster recognition of international opportunities, in addition to faster internationalization, and a more significant commitment of resources (Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005).

As a result of the literature discussion, we developed two propositions (P1 and P2). Future studies can empirically analyze these propositions through qualitative studies that better understand the relationship between the constructs' previous international experience, cultural intelligence, and early internationalization. In addition, a quantitative study, using the cultural intelligence coefficient and the mediation of IE and the degree of internationalization of companies, can contribute to the confirmation of these correlations in specific segments of companies.

CQ is a good predictor of individuals' effectiveness in decision-making, judgment, adaptation, and cross-cultural performance (Chen et al., 2011; Imai & Gelfand, 2010; Kim & Van Dyne, 2012; Charoensukmongkol, 2015). Therefore, one can predict the contribution of CQ to international performance at the firm level. In particular, there is a need to integrate the concept of CQ at the individual level into organizational outcomes as this connection remains poorly researched (Ang & Inkpen, 2008; Charoensukmongkol, 2015; Liao & Thomas, 2020). Studies that link the CQ with the internationalization process will contribute to the studies of International Business and International Entrepreneurship, in addition to elucidating important organizational issues for companies to understand their dynamics of expansion and performance.

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**CONTEXTUS**

CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT.

ISSN 1678-2089

ISSNe 2178-9258

1. Economics, Administration and Accounting - Journal
2. Federal University of Ceará. Faculty of Economics, Administration, Actuaries and Accounting

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