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THE ROLE OF CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

L'abilità di interfacciarsi con mercati culturalmente diversi sta diventando oggi sempre più importante per essere efficaci nell'arena competitiva internazionale. La globalizzazione pone infatti le organizzazioni di fronte a sfide che non esistevano in passato: gli individui sono portati ogni giorno a interagire e costruire relazioni con clienti provenienti da ogni parte del mondo. Le differenze culturali non si riflettono solo sulle barriere linguistiche, sulle abitudini e sulla gestualità, ma anche sulla concezione del tempo e del lavoro.

La presente tesi si propone di esplorare il ruolo rivestito dalla cultura sulle performance di vendita internazionale con un particolare focus sul concetto di intelligenza culturale (CQ), definita dalla letteratura come la capacità di un individuo di funzionare e di gestire efficacemente le relazioni in un contesto culturalmente diverso.

Il lavoro si apre con la presentazione della revisione sistematica della letteratura, un'analisi descrittiva e tematica che ha portato all'individuazione di quattro principali filoni di ricerca emersi negli anni. Dopo una panoramica sugli studi che hanno discusso le implicazioni della CQ nelle vendite interculturali, una trattazione approfondita è stata dedicata al modello empirico proposto da Charoensukmongkol

(2019), sulla cui base è stata sviluppata l'indagine qualitativa illustrata nel Capitolo 3. La ricerca è stata condotta tra i direttori commerciali di aziende italiane B2B operanti nei mercati internazionali con l'obiettivo di indagare l'influenza dell'intelligenza culturale, del comportamento adattivo di vendita e della mindfulness sulle performance dei venditori.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, cross-cultural selling skills are becoming more and more important to be effective in the international competitive arena. People living in different places have different cultures, boundaries are reduced by globalization and this requires increasing interactions among individuals with culturally diverse backgrounds. Globalization, in fact, put organizations in front of challenges that did not exist in the past: with these changes, individuals are pushed every day to interact and build relationships with customers who have different behaviors, habits and values, and those who are unwilling or unable to recognize these challenges and adapt their interactions to their interlocutor will struggle to achieve higher performances in cross-cultural selling[1].

Cultural differences do not only reflect on language barriers, different mannerism and gestures, but also on the way time is conceived and workplace etiquette in different parts of the world. In order to avoid misunderstandings, cultural sensitivity is essential: understanding and knowing about cultural differences is a key skill for an effective international sales performance.

1 D.S. BAKER & D. DELPECHITRE, *An innovative approach to teaching cultural intelligence in personal selling*, "Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education", vol. 24, no. 1, 2016, p. 78.

The present work aims to explore the role played by culture in international sales performance, with a particular focus on the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ), that is defined as an individual's capability to function effectively across cultures[2]. The construct of CQ, which is multidimensional, first emerged from the research of Earley and Ang (2003)[3], who operationalized it at an individual level, encompassing motivational, cognitive, metacognitive and behavioral dimensions. However, it was only after 2010 that academic research started to investigate how cultural intelligence could have an impact on sales performance. In fact, rather than expecting salespeople to master all the norms, values, practices of the various cultures they interact with, cultural intelligence enables them to develop an overall perspective, which can help them be more effective in cross-cultural negotiations[4] and navigate many complex interactions.

Although research recognizes the potential impact of cultural intelligence, very few studies have been published so far; in particular, a gap in literature emerged regarding the effectiveness of CQ in real cross-cultural selling settings.

[2] L. VAN DYNE *et al.* (2010, p. 132).

[3] S. ANG & A.C. INKPEN, *Cultural intelligence and offshore outsourcing success: a framework of firm-level intercultural capability*, "Decision Sciences" no. 39, 2008, pp. 337 – 58.

[4] L. VAN DYNE, S. ANG & D. LIVERMORE, *Cultural intelligence: a pathway for leading in a rapidly globalizing world*. In "K.M. Hannum, B. Mc Feeters & L. Booysen (Eds.), Leadership across differences: cases and perspectives", San Francisco, CQ, Pfeiffer, 2010, p. 131.

This thesis opens by presenting a systematic literature review, which consisted of both a descriptive and thematic analysis and led to the identification of four main research streams that emerged in the past years, regarding sales performance and cultural intelligence. For the purpose of the thesis, among the themes emerged, the one regarding CQ implications in cross-cultural sales was selected and examined in depth in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 offers an overview of the studies which dealt with CQ implications in cultural sales, encompassing the themes of adaptive selling behavior, customer-oriented behavior and performance. An in-depth analysis is dedicated to the empirical model suggested by Charoensukmongkol (2019)[5], who is one of the earliest to assess the effectiveness of cultural intelligence in real cross-cultural selling situations. In his work, he conducts a quantitative research with the objective of investigating the contribution of cultural intelligence in adaptive selling behaviors and international sales performance and the moderating effect of trait mindfulness, using a sample of salespeople working at international trade-shows.

Finally, Chapter 3 presents an empirical analysis, which was developed on the basis of an adaptation of Charoensukmongkol's model. The qualitative research was conducted among sales managers of Italian B2B firms operating in the international

[5] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *The Efficacy of Cultural Intelligence for Adaptive Selling Behaviors in Cross-Cultural Selling: The Moderating Effect of Trait Mindfulness*, "Journal of Global Marketing", 2019.

markets, with the aim to investigate the influence of cultural intelligence, adaptive selling behavior and mindfulness on salespeople's performance.

CHAPTER 1

SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Systematic literature review: methodology and phases

The literature review process is a key tool in management research, which adopts "a replicable, scientific and transparent process […] that aims to minimize bias through exhaustive literature searches […] and by providing an audit trail of the reviewers' decisions, procedures and conclusions."[1]. Systematic reviews are effective in identifying gaps, contradictions and consistencies in research findings, and may indicate where further research is required[2].

This systematic literature review follows the three steps suggested by Tranfield *et al.* (2003): planning, conducting, reporting and dissemination. The methodology, inspired by the process of systematic review used in the medical sciences, is meant to provide a replicable procedure that can be applied to the management field. The

1 D. TRANFIELD, D. DENYER & P. SMART, *Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review*, "British Journal of Management", Vol. 14 No. 3, 2003, p. 209.

2 R.B. BRINER & N.D. WALSHE, *From passively received wisdom to actively constructed knowledge: teaching systematic review skills as a foundation of evidence-based management*, "Academy of Management Learning & Education", Vol. 13 No. 3, 2014, p. 418.

review aims to synthesize research in a systematic, transparent and reproducible manner.

1.1.1. Planning

According to Tranfield (2003), the first phase of a systematic review is about planning. In this phase, it is necessary to have a cross-disciplinary perspective and to consider alternative ways in which the research topic has been faced by former studies.

The review was carried out from September to December 2019 through a number of steps that provide a final list of articles. The attention is focused on the impact of cultural intelligence (CQ) in cross-cultural sales situations.

1.1.2. Conducting

As suggested by Tranfield *et al.* (2003), the systematic research begun with the identification of keywords and search items.

The aim of the research was to identify the role of culture in international sales processes and how cultural intelligence might affect them. Therefore, the most appropriate string search for the study to be entered into each database resulted to be: “cultural intelligence” AND (sales OR selling).

Given the comprehensiveness and the accuracy they allow in the search process, Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar were selected as internet-based

databases. Scopus was queried for keywords in the article abstract, title and keywords, while Google Scholar and Web of Science (All databases) were queried for keywords in the title only.

The search resulted in 11 hits in Scopus, 5 hits in Google Scholar and 6 hits in Web of Science, together resulting in 22 hits. After merging, 8 duplicates were identified and removed. Furthermore, since a Ph.D. dissertation and a peer-reviewed article concerned the same topic, only the latter has been included in the review, as it is presumed that the article of Pandey and Charoensukmongkol (2019)[3] provides an improved study.

In order to circumscribe the topic under review, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. The research focuses on the role of cultural intelligence in sales process management, thus all articles which deal with other issues such as consulting, cultural property, archeological sites, psychology and auctioning were excluded. Therefore, 5 records were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. On the other hand, articles that indirectly concern cultural intelligence, but which deal with cross-cultural selling, cross-cultural management and sales education, were included.

[3] A. PANDEY & P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *Contribution of cultural intelligence to adaptive selling and customer-oriented selling of salespeople at international trade shows: does cultural similarity matter*, "Journal of Asia Business Studies", vol. 13, no. 1, 2019, pp. 79-96.

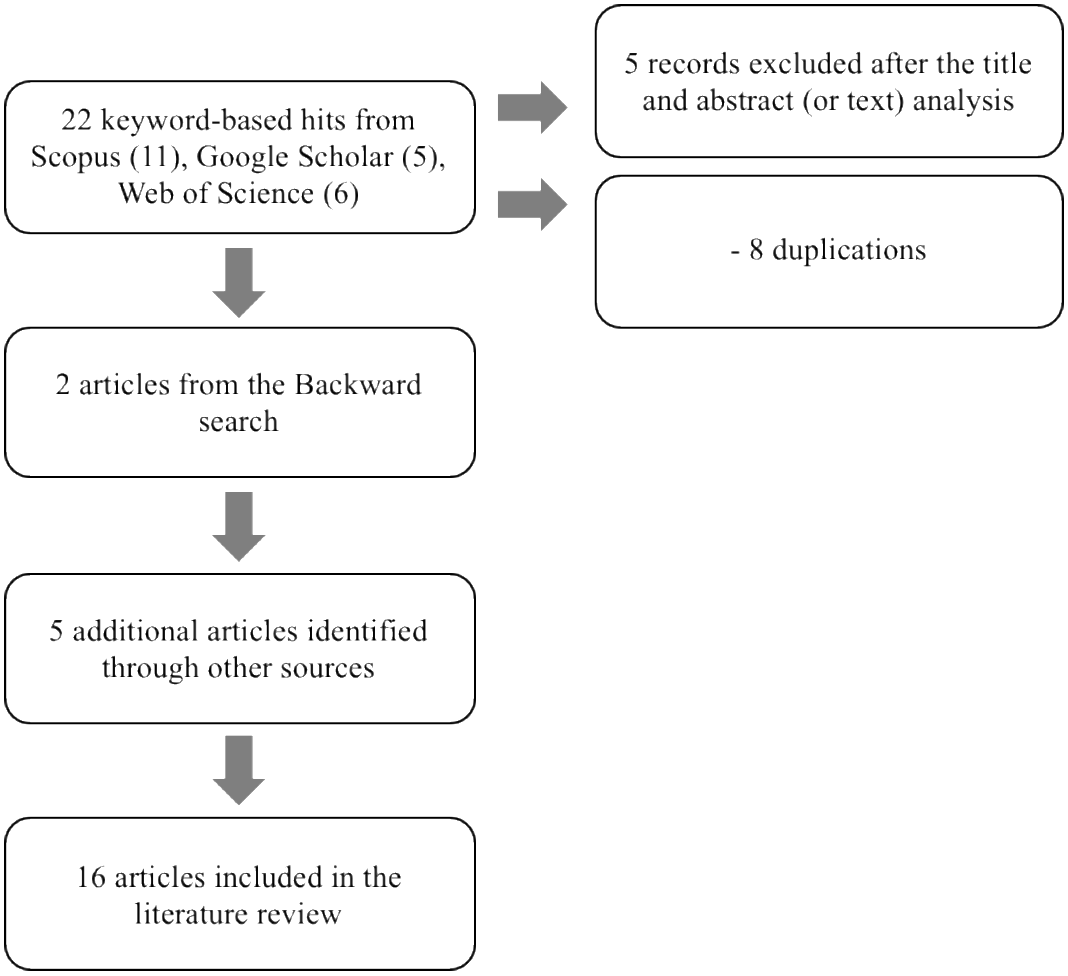

Figure 1. Keywords database search and selection of studies[4]

Since the sample was small, backwards and forwards were analyzed by screening the reference section and the citation section of each paper. The backward search

[4] Source: own elaboration.

led to the inclusion of 2 other articles, while no results were produced by the forward search. Eventually, 5 more articles were included because they were already known and considered relevant to the topic under review.

At the end of the process, the final sample encompasses 16 results, (14 peer-reviewed journal articles and 2 book chapters) related to the adoption of cultural intelligence in cross-cultural sales situations (see Figure 1).

1.1.3. Reporting and dissemination

As stated by Tranfield *et al.* (2003), the result of a good systematic review should be a synthesis of the extensive primary research from which it was derived. Therefore, a two-stage report has to be produced: the first step will provide a "descriptive analysis" of the field, conducted using a very simple set of categories, the second step will provide a "thematic analysis".

These two types of analysis will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

1.2. Descriptive analysis

First of all, a "descriptive analysis" was carried out, using the following set of categories (see Table 3):

- Title and author(s);
- Year of publication;

- Source;
- Country of study;
- Typology (conceptual or empirical);
- Methodology (qualitative, quantitative or both);
- Context;
- Participants' title.

The topic under review appears to be rather new, with a time frame covered by the articles that embraces nine years, from 2010 to 2019 (see Figure 2). Most of the research was conducted in 2012 and 2015, which yielded three and four publications respectively. No publications were produced in 2014 and 2018.

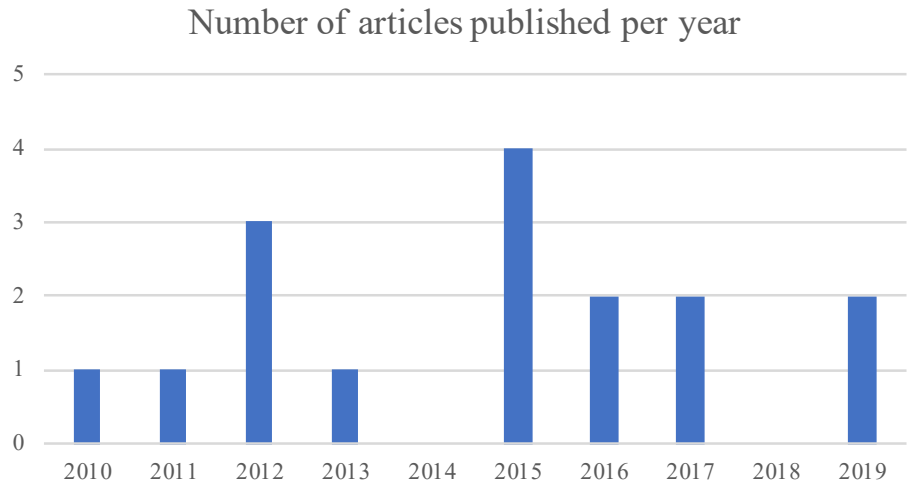

Figure 2. Publication trend by years. Source: own elaboration.

The majority of articles have been published in academic journals related to business, marketing and sales. Two articles have been published in *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, which provides publications about cross-cultural and strategic management research in the global context. Only one article has been published in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, which is not unexpected given the research topic. Eventually, two articles have been published as book chapters: *Leading Across Differences: Cases and Perspective*, a casebook that provides examples and perspectives on concepts and situations important to leading across differences and *Marketing Dynamism & Sustainability: Things Change, Things Stay the Same…* a book that contains proceedings of the 2012 Academy of Marketing Science annual conference (see Table 1).

Table 1. Publication outlets. Source: own elaboration.

Journal	**No. of publications**
Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal	2
International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition	1
International Journal of Cross Cultural Management	1
International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing	1
Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education	1
Journal of Applied Psychology	1
Journal of Asia Business Studies	1
Journal of Distribution Science	1
Journal of Global Marketing	1
Journal of Marketing Education	1
Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	1

Journal of Selling & Major Account Management	1
Leading Across Differences: *CCL Casebook - CQ Chapter, Leading Across Differences: Cases and Perspectives* (book chapter)	1
Marketing Dynamism & Sustainability: Things Change, Things Stay the Same… (book chapter)	1
Multinational Business Review	1
Total	16

Nine of the studies are empirical, six of which are quantitative and three use both qualitative and quantitative methods (see Table 2). Quantitative research uses questionnaire surveys, while qualitative/quantitative studies use methodologies such as digital storytelling and role-play performances, together with statistical analysis (PLS regression analysis, CFA, SEM and paired sample t-tests).

Table 2. Methodology of the articles. Source: own elaboration.

Typology	**No. of articles**
Empirical studies	9
Quantitative	6
Qualitative	0
Qualitative/Quantitative	3
Conceptual studies	7
Total	16

With regard to the countries of study, most of the research was conducted in the USA. Several studies were carried out in Asia: four studies were conducted in

Southeastern Asia, specifically in Thailand (three empirical studies) and in Singapore (a conceptual study); furthermore, an empirical study was conducted in Korea and a conceptual one in India.

For what concerns the context of the analysis of the empirical studies, four studies were carried out among sales students in university courses and an MBA program. The rest of them was conducted among managers or salespeople working in banks, real estate firms, trade shows and duty-free shops.

Table 3.
Descriptive analysis.
Source: own elaboration.

No.	Title/Author(s)	Year	Source	Country of study	Typology	Methodology	Context	Partici-pants' title
1	Cultural Intelligence: A Pathway for Leading in a Rapidly Globalizing World L. Van Dyne S. Ang D. Livermore	2010	*CCL Casebook - CQ Chapter, Leading Across Differences: Cases and Perspectives* (book chapter)	USA	Conceptual study	-	-	-
2	Cultural intelligence in cross-cultural selling: Propositions and directions for future research J. Hansen T. Singh D. Weilbaker R. Guesalaga	2011	*Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*	USA, Chile	Conceptual study	-	-	-
3	Emotional and social intelligence competencies: Cross cultural implications R. Emmerling R. Boyatzis	2012	*Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*	USA	Conceptual study	-	-	-

No.	Title/Author(s)	Year	Source	Country of study	Typology	Methodology	Context	Partici-pants' title
4	A multilevel investigation of motivational cultural intelligence, organizational diversity climate, and cultural sales: Evidence from U.S. real estate firms X.P. Chen D. Liu D R. Portnoy	2012	*Journal of Applied Psychology*	USA	Empirical	Quantitative (questionnaire survey, PLS regression analysis, N = 305)	Real estate firms	Real estate agents
5	Cross-cultural Selling and Sales Management G.R. Schirr L.E. Schirr	2012	*Journal of Selling & Major Account Management*	USA	Conceptual study	-	-	-
6	Cultural exposure, emotional intelligence, and cultural intelligence: An exploratory study K.A. Crowne	2013	*International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*	USA	Empirical	Quantitative (survey, regression analysis, N = 485)	Large university	Students
7	Assessing the cultural intelligence and task performance equation Mediating role of cultural adjustment J. Jyoti S. Kour	2015	*Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*	India	Empirical	Quantitative (structured questionnaire, CFA, SEM, N= 219)	Nationaliz ed banks	Managers

No.	Title/Author(s)	Year	Source	Country of study	Typology	Methodology	Context	Partici-pants' title
8	Cultural Intelligence and Competencies S. Ang S T. Rockstuhl M.L. Tan	2015	*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition*	Singapore	Conceptual study	-	-	-
9	Digital sales negotiation stories C. Bechter F.W. Swierczek	2015	*International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing*	Thailand	Empirical	Both methods (production of 267 negotiation stories, cultural analysis and regression, N = 202)	Global Executive MBA	Students
10	Cultural Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence in External and Internal Sales Relationships F.G. Lassk Y. Lee	2015	*Marketing Dynamism & Sustainability: Things Change, Things Stay the Same…* (book chapter)	USA	Conceptual study	-	-	-
11	An Innovative Approach to Teaching Cultural Intelligence in Personal Selling D.S. Baker D. Delpechitre	2016	*Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education*	USA	Empirical	Both methods (role-play performances, paired sample t-tests, N = 79)	Public university	Students

No.	Title/Author(s)	Year	Source	Country of study	Typology	Methodology	Context	Partici-pants' title
12	Emergence of cultural intelligence and global mindset capital: a multilevel model J.R. Ramsey A. Abi Aad C. Jiang L. Barakat V. Drummond	2016	*Multinational Business Review*	USA, Lebanon, Brasil, France	Conceptual study	-	-	-
13	The moderating effects of salesperson's cultural intelligence in intercultural sales encounters L.L. Kong H.G. Kim Y.J. Kim	2017	*Journal of Distribution Science*	Korea	Empirical	Quantitative (survey, N = 312)	Duty-free shops	Sales-people
14	Cross-Cultural Selling: Examining the Importance of Cultural Intelligence in Sales Education D. Delpechitre D. S. Baker	2017	*Journal of Marketing Education*	USA	Empirical	Both methods (role-play performances, SEM, N = 143)	University	Sales students in an advanced personal selling course

No.	Title/Author(s)	Year	Source	Country of study	Typology	Methodology	Context	Partici-pants' title
15	Contribution of cultural intelligence to adaptive selling and customer-oriented selling of salespeople at international trade shows: does cultural similarity matter? A. Pandey P. Charoensukmongkol	2019	*Journal of Asia Business Studies*	Thailand	Empirical	Quantitative (questionnaire survey, PLS-SEM, N = 210)	Trade shows	Thai sales-people
16	The Efficacy of Cultural Intelligence for Adaptive Selling Behaviors in Cross-Cultural Selling: The Moderating Effect of Trait Mindfulness P. Charoensukmongkol	2019	*Journal of Global Marketing*	Thailand	Empirical	Quantitative (questionnaire survey, PLS regression analysis, N = 365)	Trade shows	Thai sales-people

1.3. Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis aims to identify key emerging themes in the literature review (see Table 4).

Four main research streams were identified:

- The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ)
- Cultural distance
- CQ implications in cross-cultural sales
- Education

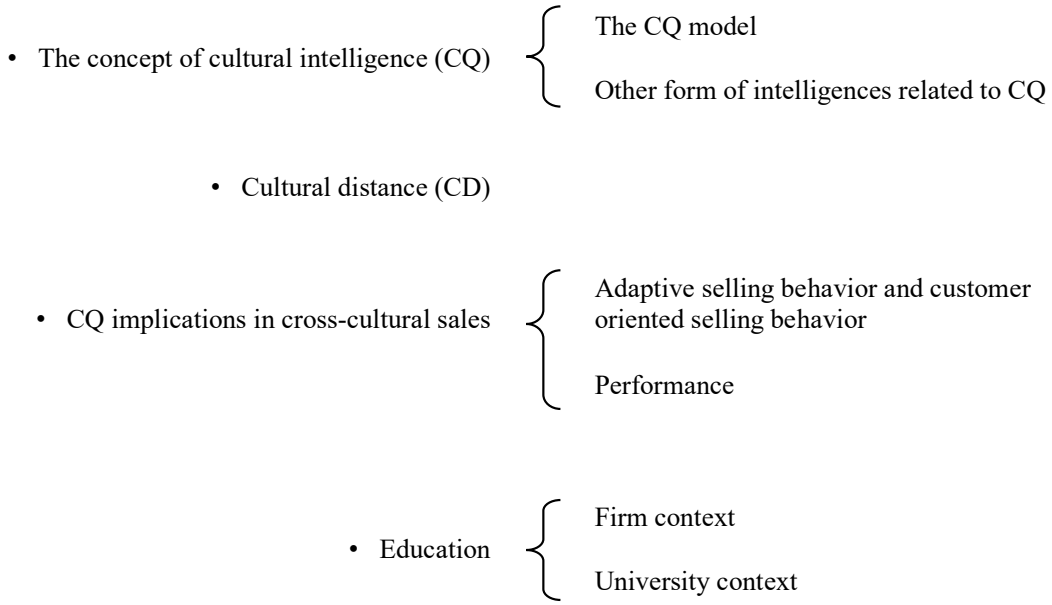

Figure 1. Thematic analysis. Source: own elaboration.

Among the four streams, sub-themes emerged. First, with regard to the concept of cultural intelligence, the CQ model and other forms of intelligence related to CQ (such as emotional intelligence) were discussed. Second, in relation to CQ implications in cross-cultural sales, adaptive selling behavior, customer-oriented selling behavior and performance were considered. Lastly, with reference to education, both firm and university contexts were examined.

1.3.1. The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ)

The CQ model

Most research in this category builds on the CQ model as theorized by Van Dyne *et al*. (2010) [1]. Cultural intelligence is here described as "an essential skill set needed to lead effectively across culture", that focuses on one's capability to function effectively across cultures. In their study, they investigate the reason why some individuals are able to easily and effectively adapt their views and behaviors cross-culturally and why others don't. This capability lies on the Four-Factor Model of Cultural Intelligence, composed of Motivational CQ – the leader's level of interest, *drive*, and energy to adapt cross-culturally – Cognitive CQ – the knowledge dimension of cultural intelligence – Metacognitive CQ – the leader's ability to

[1] L. VAN DYNE, S. ANG & D. LIVERMORE, *Cultural intelligence: a pathway for leading in a rapidly globalizing world*. In "K.M. Hannum, B. Mc Feeters & L. Booysen (Eds.), Leadership across differences: cases and perspectives", San Francisco, CQ, Pfeiffer, 2010, p. 131.

strategize when crossing cultures – and Behavioral CQ – the capability to be flexible in verbal and non-verbal actions. Ang *et al.* (2015) assert that "cultural intelligence is a general set of capabilities that facilitate one's effectiveness across different cultural environments. In this sense, cultural intelligence is culture-free"[2].

Other forms of intelligence related to CQ

Ang *et al.* (2015) affirm that the conceptualization of CQ draws upon the history of intelligence research which suggests that intelligence is multifaced[3]. As stated by Van Dyne *et al.* (2010), cultural intelligence (CQ) draws on intelligent quotient (IQ) – the measurement of one's intellectual capabilities – and emotional intelligence (EQ) – the ability to lead and interact with people paying attention to the emotions of self and of others. According to Emmerling and Boyatzis (2012), emotional intelligence is "an ability to recognize, understand and use emotional information about oneself that leads to or causes effective or superior performance"[4]. Therefore, it is stated that CQ builds upon and extent EQ, but focuses on one's capability to

2 S. ANG, T. ROCKSTUHL & M.L. TAN, *Cultural Intelligence and Competencies* in "International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition", 2015, p. 433.

3 *Ibidem.*

4 R.J. EMMERLING & R.E. BOYATZIS, *Emotional and social intelligence competencies: Cross cultural implications*, "Cross Cultural Management", vol. 19, no. 1, 2012, p. 8.

effectively understand and adapt to different cultural contexts[5]. Crowne (2013)[6] investigates the influence of cultural exposure on emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence. The findings of her research show a low correlation between emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence. On the one hand, cultural exposure does not influence emotional intelligence even when examining the depth and breadth of exposures; on the other hand, cultural exposure does have an influence on cultural intelligence. The low correlation between EQ and CQ could be considered as a limit since other studies have found them to be correlated. However, Crowne states that the previous studies used different measures of emotional intelligence and many have also pointed out how these forms of intelligence, while similar, are actually distinct, so the low correlation is not unexpected. Cultural intelligence, according to Ang *et al.* (2015)[7], is, in fact, similar to social and emotional intelligence in that CQ is a form of interpersonal intelligence. The difference between these three forms of intelligence lies in the fact that CQ explicitly considers the intercultural context.

[5] L. VAN DYNE *et al.* (2010, p. 133).

[6] K.A. CROWNE, *Cultural exposure, emotional intelligence, and cultural intelligence: An exploratory study*, "International Journal of Cross Cultural Management", vol. 13, no. 1, 2013, pp. 5-22.

[7] S. ANG *et al.* (2015, p. 433).

Therefore, research suggests that being high in emotional or social intelligence does not imply being high in cultural intelligence.

1.3.2. Cultural distance (CD)

Hansen *et al.* (2011) argue that the challenges related to intercultural selling are expected to become greater as cultural distance increases in cross-cultural selling contexts. They demonstrate that "cultural distance positively moderates the relationship between salesperson cultural adaptation and salesperson performance". In fact, in their opinion, it is reasonable to think that the effects of cultural adaptation will be more evident when the cultural distance is high and that salespeople will be therefore more motivated to adapt. On the contrary, when the cultural distance between salesperson and customer is relatively low, a salesperson is more likely to adopt a standard approach in the interaction[8]. In this regard, Bechter and Swierczek (2015) show that "the lack of awareness of cultural distance and the limited cultural intelligence results in sales negotiations that will end in a lose-lose or win-lose situation at best"[9]. Therefore, successful negotiators need to understand what the counterpart's cultural styles and objectives are, and also the

8 J.D. HANSEN, T. SINGH, D.C. WEILBAKER & R. GUESALAGA, *Cultural intelligence in cross-cultural selling: Propositions and directions for future research*, "Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management", vol. 31, no. 3, 2011, p. 249.

9 C. BECHTER & F.W. SWIERCZEK *Digital sales negotiation stories*, "International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing", vol. 6, no. 3, 2015, p. 174.

negotiation tendencies of a specific culture. In their study, Pandey and Charoensukmongkol (2019)[10] demonstrate that the positive relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behavior is stronger in countries where culture differs more than in the home culture of salespeople.

Cultural distance is, therefore, a factor that has to be considered when studying the benefits of CQ in cross-cultural contexts.

1.3.3. CQ implications in cross-cultural sales

Adaptive selling behavior and customer-oriented selling behavior

On the one side, Hansen *et al.* (2011)[11] state that cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, behavioral CQ and motivational CQ are positively related to effective cultural adaptation. On the other side, they state that as salespeople engage in cultural adaptation, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, behavioral CQ and motivational CQ increase. According to this vision, Delpechitre and Baker (2017)[12] noted that sales students with high levels of CQ are more able to adapt their selling behaviors in a

10 A. PANDEY & P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *Contribution of cultural intelligence to adaptive selling and customer-oriented selling of salespeople at international trade shows: does cultural similarity matter?*, *"Journal of Asia Business Studies",* vol. 13, no. 1, 2019, pp. 79-96.

11 J.D. HANSEN *et al.* (2011, p. 247).

12 D. DELPECHITRE & D.S. BAKER, *Cross-Cultural Selling: Examining the Importance of Cultural Intelligence in Sales Education*, "Journal of Marketing Education"*,* vol. 39, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-15.

culturally diverse selling context. Therefore, they stated that, applied within personal or business relationships, CQ is a form of adaptive behavior. Their model aims to demonstrate that high cognitive, metacognitive, motivational and behavioral CQ are positively related to a high propensity for ASB within a buyer-seller relationship. In their research, they hypothesize and demonstrate that sales students' cognitive, metacognitive, motivational and behavioral CQ will have a positive relationship with ASB in cross-cultural selling and that sales students' ASB that focus on cross-cultural attributes will have a positive influence on their role-play (a practice used in sales-related courses) performance in a cross-cultural setting. The contribution of CQ in helping salespeople demonstrate ASB with foreign customers is also investigated by Charoensukmongkol (2019) [13]: in order to successfully engage in ASB, it is necessary for salespeople to deeply understand foreign cultures, to be able to anticipate their needs and to know how to react to meet their cultural expectations; all of these features are easily found in people with a high CQ. The empirical analysis supported the hypothesis according to which there is a positive relationship between CQ and ASB and the hypothesis according to which the level of trait mindfulness moderates the positive relationship between

13 P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *The Efficacy of Cultural Intelligence for Adaptive Selling Behaviors in Cross-Cultural Selling: The Moderating Effect of Trait Mindfulness*, "Journal of Global Marketing", 2019.

CQ and ASB. Pandey and Charoensukmongkol (2019)[14], demonstrate that salespeople with a higher CQ are more likely to show a higher degree of adaptive selling behavior and customer-oriented selling behavior. In this respect, since salesperson's customer-oriented selling behavior is particularly important to achieve successful interactions, especially in the field of retailing, Kong *et al.* (2017)[15] assess the causal relationships between empathy, customer-oriented selling behavior and the moderating effects of cultural intelligence in intercultural sales encounters.

Performance

Several studies highlight the connection between CQ and sales performance. Hansen *et al.* (2011) state that salespeople high in CQ are more likely to be effective in cross-cultural selling contexts, as they are better able to adapt to the cultural backgrounds of the customers they serve[16]. The reason for this is that salespeople are able to alter their behaviors using cultural intelligence (CQ) in order to improve

14 A. PANDEY & P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *Contribution of cultural intelligence to adaptive selling and customer-oriented selling of salespeople at international trade shows: does cultural similarity matter?*, *"Journal of Asia Business Studies",* vol. 13, no. 1, 2019, pp. 79-96.

15 L. KONG, H. KIM & Y. KIM, *The moderating effects of salesperson's cultural intelligence in intercultural sales encounters*, "Journal of Distribution Science", vol. 15, no. 12, 2017, pp. 85-94.

16 J.D. HANSEN *et al.* (2011, p. 244).

their performance. Altering their behaviors according to their customer is a kind of adaptive selling behavior (ASB): this is a fundamental skill for those who sell in intercultural contexts given the differences that exist across cultures. In this regard, Hansen *et al.* (2011) state that "salesperson cultural adaptation is positively related to salesperson performance". Charoensukmongkol (2019) examines the contribution of CQ to international sales performance. The findings of his research support the hypothesis according to which ASB mediate the positive relationship between CQ and international sales performance. "The study found that adaptive selling behaviors demonstrated by salespeople were positively associated with international sales performance. Although CQ did not show a direct relationship with international sales performance, the relationship was significantly mediated by adaptive selling behaviors"[17]. Besides, Chen *et al.* (2012) focus on the predictive power of motivational cultural intelligence for cross-cultural effectiveness of employees. The findings of their research suggest that an individual's motivational CQ is a significant predictor of his/her cultural sales[18], rather than any sales.

17 P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 11).

18 X. CHEN, D. LIU, D. & R. PORTNOY, *A multilevel investigation of motivational cultural intelligence, organizational diversity climate, and cultural sales: Evidence from U.S. real estate firms*, "Journal of Applied Psychology", vol. 97, no. 1, 2012, p. 100.

According to Jyoti and Kour (2015)[19] cultural intelligence is a tool that can increase an individual's ability to interact with people from other cultures. In fact, their research findings reveal that cultural intelligence positively affects task performance: cultural intelligent managers are better able to understand and perform the role or task assigned to them as well as to interact with people outside their culture, thus resulting in better task performance.

In accordance with this view, Bechter and Swierczek (2015)[20] state that cultural features influence international sales negotiation; in particular, in their research, they focus on cultural distance and cultural intelligence as key factors related to successful outcomes. Using digital negotiation stories based on actual sales negotiations in order to assess their hypotheses, the study shows that CQ is not a sufficient predictor of sales negotiation outcomes and that other dimensions have to be considered.

Lassk and Lee (2015)[21] associate a salesperson's intelligence and interactions with his/her performance. Particularly, they propose cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence as antecedents of external (adaptive selling) and internal interactions.

[19] J. JYOTI & S. KOUR, *Assessing the cultural intelligence and task performance equation Mediating role of cultural adjustment*, "Cross Cultural Management", vol. 22, no. 2, 2015, p. 250.

[20] C. BECHTER & F.W. SWIERCZEK (2015, pp. 165-178)

[21] F.G. LASSK & Y. LEE, *Cultural intelligence and Emotional Intelligence in External and Internal Sales Relationships*. In: Robinson, Jr. L. (Eds.), "Marketing Dynamism & Sustainability:

Furthermore, Ramsey *et al.* (2016)[22] discuss cultural intelligence (CQ) and global mindset (GM) and how they are related to performance. In their research, in fact, they link unit-level KSAs (knowledge, skill, ability) to unit-level outcomes, such as commitment and performance. According to them, CQ and GM models can predict performance outcomes at both individual and organizational level: practical implications of their research is that managers who want to improve individual-level commitment should select and train individuals who are high in CQ; on the other hand, when focusing on firm-level sales or performance, the emphasis should be on targeting individuals high in GM.

Finally, Delpechitre and Baker (2017)[23], whose study focused on the importance of CQ in sales education, conducted an empirical research among sales students which led to the conclusion that students who are able to alter their selling behaviors and strategies during buyer-seller interactions, focusing on cross-cultural attributes and contextual settings, are able to perform at a higher level during their role-play presentations. Results of their study, therefore, highlighted the relationship between students' CQ, ASB and sales role-play performance.

Things Change, Things Stay the Same… Developments in Marketing Science: Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Science", Springer, Cham, 2015.

22 J.R. RAMSEY, A. ABI AAD, C. JIANG, L. BARAKAT & V. DRUMMOND, *Emergence of cultural intelligence and global mindset capital: a multilevel model*, "Multinational Business Review", vol. 24, no. 2, 2016, pp. 116.

23 D. DELPECHITRE & D.S. BAKER (2017, p. 10).

1.3.4. Education

Firm context

With regard to the cross-cultural selling context, Schirr and Schirr (2012) state that many difficult and complex issues have to be considered. Among these, they focus on cross-cultural selling strategy and tactics, claiming that "training in body language and business etiquette should be provided for all the managers and salespersons who will be a part of the cross-cultural selling effort"[24]. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to train salespersons. In particular, cultural intelligence is a factor that can help deal with temporal issues – as time is perceived differently in different cultures – and mitigate the relationship between salespersons and prospects or clients. As a practical implication of their research, Jyoti and Kour (2015)[25] propose that CQ is a capability that can be enhanced over time thanks to training and experience. In this regard, Maikhu (2016) assesses the effects of a cultural intelligence development program for Indochina sales supervisors. Research findings demonstrate that employee's cultural intelligence was higher after participating in the program[26]. Training programs will increase managers'

[24] G.R. SCHIRR & L.E. SCHIRR, *Cross-cultural Selling and Sales Management*, "Journal of Selling & Major Account Management", vol. 12, no. 2, 2012, p. 56.

[25] J. JYOTI & S. KOUR (2015, p. 251).

[26] V. MAIKHU, *The effect of cultural intelligence development program for Indochina sales supervisor*, "International Journal of Psychology", vol. 51, supplement 1, special issue, 2016, pp. 765-766.

cultural intelligence and help them deal with unfamiliar cross-cultural situations: training will give them the confidence to effectively interact and work in a new and unfamiliar environment, thus enhancing their performance[27]. In agreement with this vision, Kong et al. (2017)[28] state that regular professional training programs for salespeople help cultivate cultural intelligence.

Linking unit-level KSAs capital to unit-level outcomes, Ramsey *et al.* (2016)[29] highlight the importance of unit-level KSAs – both CQ and GM – further justifying the need for training on the concepts. Pandey and Charoensukmongkol (2019)[30], demonstrate that salespeople CQ is positively related to adaptive selling behavior and customer-oriented selling behavior. Therefore, they suggest that CQ development programs could be considered as part of the training provided by organizations to salespeople in order to help them acquire cross-cultural competencies to deal effectively with foreign customers.

[27] J. JYOTI & S. KOUR (2015, p. 252).

[28] L. KONG, H. KIM & Y. KIM (2017).

[29] J.R. RAMSEY *et al.* (2016, p. 116).

[30] A. PANDEY & P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019).

University context

Baker and Delpechitre (2016) highlight that the importance of cultural intelligence in selling processes has become more evident in today's cross-cultural context. As a response to this need, in their paper, they propose a teaching method – involving role-play performance – that provides a systematic framework and self-assessment which can be used to integrate cultural intelligence in sales teaching courses[31]. The results show that the scores on sales role-play performance and on each CQ dimension increased thanks to the proposed training method, thus enhancing the importance of cross-cultural intelligence in sales processes. Given today's competitive business, cross-cultural selling has become an important factor in sales education. In fact, it is essential for students to acquire an education in sales during their undergraduate program, to be able to perform sales at a higher level when they enter the workforce in frontline customer service positions.

In the global context, the workforce is likely to interact with multinational and cross-cultural teams and also to face difficulties and challenges typical of culture and international business[32]. Delpechitre and Baker's study (2017)[33] focuses on the

31 D.S. BAKER & D. DELPECHITRE, *An innovative approach to teaching cultural intelligence in personal selling*, "Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education", vol. 24, no. 1, 2016, pp. 78-87.

32 D. DELPECHITRE & D.S. BAKER (2017, p. 1).

33 *Ivi*, p. 10.

importance of incorporating CQ into sales courses, since it shows that students with higher levels of CQ were able to adapt well to the cross-cultural selling environment, to identify customer needs, to provide customized solutions, and thus being able to perform at a higher level during their sales role-play.

Table 4.
Thematic analysis.
Source: own elaboration.

Key emerging themes	No. of papers	Subthemes	Author and description
The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ)	4	The CQ model	Four-Factor CQ Model (*Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010*). CQ is a general set of capabilities that facilitate one's effectiveness across different cultural environments. CQ is culture-free *(Ang, Ro Rockstuhl & Tan, 2015).*
		Other forms of intelligences related to CQ	CQ builds upon IQ an EQ concepts (*Van Dyne, Ang & Livermore, 2010*); Emotional intelligence *(Emmerling & Boyatzis, 2012)*; Low correlation between EQ and CQ when considering cultural exposure impact *(Crowne, 2013)* Cultural intelligence is similar to social and emotional intelligence in that CQ is a form of interpersonal intelligence, but CQ explicitly considers the intercultural context *(Ang, Rockstuhl & Tan, 2015).*

Key emerging themes	No. of papers	Subthemes	Author and description
Cultural distance (CD)	3		Cultural distance positively moderates the relationship between salesperson cultural adaptation and salesperson performance *(Hansen, Weilbaker & Guesalaga, 2011)*; The lack of awareness of cultural distance and the limited cultural intelligence results in unsuccessful sales negotiations *(Bechter & Swierczek, 2015)*; Cultural distance has to be considered when studying the benefits of CQ in cross-cultural contexts *(Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019)*.
CQ implications in cross-cultural sales	10	Customer oriented selling behavior and adaptive selling behavior	Cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, behavioral CQ and motivational CQ are positively related to effective cultural adaptation *(Hansen, Weilbaker & Guesalaga, 2011)*; High cognitive, metacognitive, motivational and behavioral CQ are positively related to a high propensity for ASB between a buyer-seller relationship *(Delpechitre, & Baker, 2017)*; There is a positive relationship between CQ and ASB*;* the level of trait mindfulness moderates the positive relationship between CQ and ASB *(Charoensukmongkol, 2019)*; Causal relationships between empathy, COSB and the moderating effects of CQ in intercultural sales encounters *(Kong, Kim & Kim, 2017);*

Key emerging themes	No. of papers	Subthemes	Author and description
			Salespeople with a higher CQ are more likely to show a higher degree of ASB and COSB *(Charoensukmongkol, 2019)*; Salespeople CQ is positively related to adaptive selling behavior and customer-oriented selling behavior *(Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019)*.
		Performance	High CQ salespeople are more likely to be effective in cross-cultural selling contexts *(Hansen, Weilbaker & Guesalaga, 2011);* Motivational CQ is a significant predictor of cultural sales *(Chen, Liu & Portnoy, 2012)*; Cultural intelligence positively affects task performance *(Jyoti & Kour, 2015);* Cultural intelligence is not a sufficient predictor of sales negotiation outcomes *(Bechter & Swierczek, 2015)*; Cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence are proposed as antecedents of a salesperson's external and internal interactions *(Lassk & Lee, 2015)*; Relationship between cultural intelligence (CQ), global mindset (GM) and performance *(Ramsey, Abi Aad, Jiang, Barakat, & Drummond, 2016)*; ASB mediate the positive relationship between CQ and international sales performance *(Charoensukmongkol, 2019);* Relationship between students' CQ, ASBs and sales role-play performance (*Delpechitre & Baker, 2017*).

Key emerging themes	No. of papers	Subthemes	Author and description
Education	7	Firm context	Training managers and salespersons who will be a part of the cross-cultural selling effort *(Schirr & Schirr, 2012)*; Organizations should provide cultural training to the managers, which will enhance their performance *(Jyoti and Kour, 2015)*; Employees' cultural intelligence increases after attending the Cultural Intelligence development program *(Maikhu, 2016);* Need for training on CQ and GM concepts *(Ramsey, Abi Aad, Jiang, Barakat & Drummond, 2016)*; CQ development programs could be considered as part of the training provided by organizations to salespeople *(Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019)*.
		University context	Cultural training can improve sales role-play performance and CQ dimensions *(Baker & Delpechitre, 2016)*; Cross-cultural selling is an important factor in sales education *(Delpechitre & Baker, 2017)*.

Among the four major streams of research which have just been discussed, CQ implications in cross-cultural sales will be further investigated in the following Chapter 2, particularly focusing on how cultural intelligence could have an impact on cross-cultural sales.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IMPLICATIONS ON PERFORMANCE

2.1. Cultural intelligence in today's economic scenario

"Culture […] is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities or habits acquired by man as a member of society"[1].

International sales encounters in today's globalized world can be challenging: the increasing interaction among people with different cultural backgrounds requires organizations to focus on cultural diversity[2]. In the last few decades, global initiatives increased among firms and many companies today aim to expand their business into international markets to take advantage of global opportunities and

1 J.D. MOORE, *Visions of culture*. *An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*, AltaMira Press; Third edition, 2008, p. 5.

2 C. BECHTER & F.W. SWIERCZEK (2015, pp. 166).

demand[3]; many companies derive a large percentage of their revenues from global operations but, "although the globalization of firms offers exciting opportunities for intercultural contact, it also comes with challenges due to misunderstandings, tensions and conflicts"[4].

Albeit technological and logistical capabilities allow firms to build and supply global demand, it is usually the people issues that are most daunting: "salespeople that are both unwilling or unable to understand and recognize these challenges and adapt their selling behaviors accordingly to fit cross-cultural interactions will struggle to perform at a higher level in cross-cultural selling"[5]. Consequently, cross-cultural selling skills are becoming more important every day: salespeople should have the ability to understand, function and manage relationships in culturally diverse situations[6]. In fact, sales negotiation practices differ from culture to culture

[3] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 1).

[4] J.R. RAMSEY *et al.*(2016, p. 108).

[5] J.K. SEBENIUS, 2002, *The hidden challenge of cross-border negotiations*, "Harvard Business Review", vol. 80*,* no. 3, 2002, pp. 76-85; J. WADE, "*The pitfalls of cross-cultural business*, "Risk Management", vol. 51, no. 3, 2004, pp. 38-43; quoted by D. DELPECHITRE & D.S. BAKER (2017, p. 1).

[6] D. DELPECHITRE & D.S. BAKER (2017, p. 1).

and the skills that constitute a talented manager in the domestic market may not be the same as in international markets[7].

A need to understand why some salespeople perform better than others in cross-cultural situations has, therefore, emerged[8]. Recently, researchers have started to conjecture about the factors influencing the effectiveness of sales performance in cross-cultural situations. In this respect, cultural intelligence is a tool that can increase one's ability to interact with people outside their cultures, as it focuses on an individual's capability to function effectively across cultures, understanding and adapting to a myriad of cultural contexts[9]. Cultural intelligent people are able to detect, assimilate, reason and act on cultural cues appropriately in cross-cultural situations and are more effective in decision making, communicating and negotiating across the cultures[10].

This type of intelligence is, therefore, a compulsory requirement for cross-cultural sales success[11].

[7] M. JAVIDAN, G.K. STAHL, F.C. BRODBECK, & C.P.M. WILDEROM, *Cross-border transfer of knowledge: cultural lessons from project globe*, "Academy of Management Executive", vol. 19, no. 2, 2005, pp. 59-76; quoted by J.R. RAMSEY *et al.* (2016, p. 107).

[8] J.D. HANSEN *et al.* (2011, p. 243).

[9] L. VAN DYNE, *et al.* (2010, p. 131).

[10] J. JYOTI & S. KOUR (2015, p. 237).

[11] J.D. HANSEN *et al.* (2011, p. 246).

2.2. Cultural intelligence and performance

Cultural intelligence is defined as an individual's capability to function effectively across cultures (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2010). It is a multidimensional construct, consisting of a motivational, cognitive, metacognitive and behavioral component (Figure 2). The four dimensions are different, yet interrelated. While metacognition, cognition and motivation are mental capabilities, behavioral capabilities are exhibited through the actions[12].

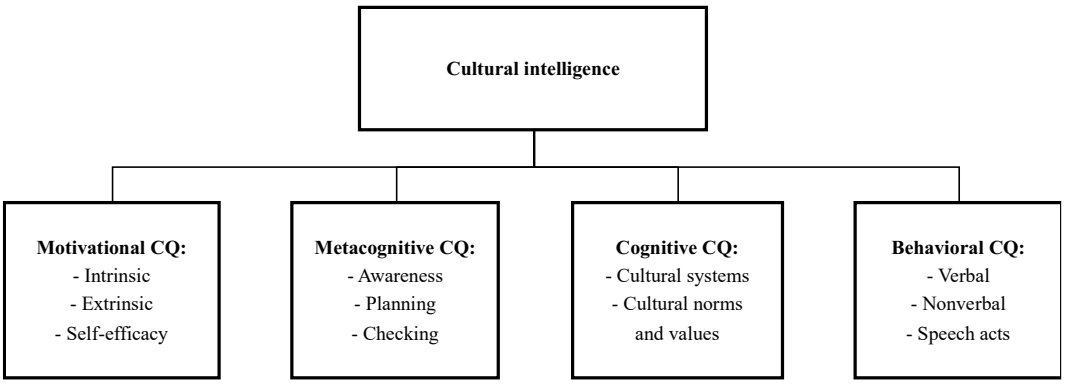

Figure 2. Cultural intelligence dimensions. Source: Van Dyne *et al.* (2010, p. 134).

[12] L. VAN DYNE *et al.* (2010, p. 132).

Cognitive cultural intelligence is defined as the knowledge dimension of cultural intelligence and refers to one's ability to "understand the idea of culture and culture's role in shaping the way to do business and interact with others across cultural contexts"[13]. Recalling the concept of knowledge structures, Hansen *et al.* (2011) state that "as a form of declarative knowledge, salespeople high in cognitive CQ have richer and more clearly defined hierarchical structures of cultural knowledge"[14]. Thanks to this characteristic, salespeople are better able to adapt effectively when interacting in culturally complex countries. Therefore, they propose that cognitive CQ is positively related to effective cultural adaptation.

Metacognitive cultural intelligence is defined as one's ability to strategize when crossing cultures and the ability to use one's cultural knowledge in order to understand different cultural contexts, plan strategies and interpreting cross-cultural situations. It includes awareness, planning and checking[15]. This dimension is defined by Hansen *et al.* as a form of procedural knowledge, and it is therefore stated that salespeople who are high in metacognitive CQ "have a well-established repertoire of selling strategies closely linked to their cultural categories" [16] that

[13] *Ivi*, p. 135.

[14] J.D. HANSEN *et al.* (2011, p. 247).

[15] L. VAN DYNE *et al.* (2010, p. 136).

[16] J.D. HANSEN *et al.* (2011, p. 247).

allow them to better understand which adaptations are more appropriate in cross-cultural situations, according to the existing differences within the cultures. Furthermore, it is claimed that high metacognitive CQ enables salespeople to understand the appropriate level of adaptation, which could lead to higher-level performances.

Behavioral cultural intelligence is defined as one's ability to act appropriately in a range of cross-cultural situations and it influences the effective accomplishment of performance goals when dealing with different cultural norms[17]. It is manifested through the appropriate verbal and non-verbal communicative adaptations and speech acts, and it provides the means through which cognitive and metacognitive CQ can be applied. Thus, salespeople high in behavioral CQ are expected to be better able to adapt their communication, according to the cultural backgrounds of the customers they serve[18].

Lastly, motivational CQ refers to one's "level of interest, drive, and energy to adapt cross-culturally". It includes intrinsic motivation – the degree to which one derives enjoyment from culturally diverse situations; extrinsic motivation – the more tangible benefits one gains from culturally diverse experiences; and self-efficacy – one's confidence that he/she will be effective in a cross-cultural encounter. A high

[17] L. VAN DYNE *et al.* (2010, p. 137).

[18] J.D. HANSEN *et al.* (2011, p. 248).

degree of self-confidence is required in order to achieve successful intercultural interactions: when people believe in their capability to succeed in challenging situations, in facts, they will be proactive in obtaining and gathering useful information and resources in order to develop effective strategies[19]. Therefore, it should be easier for salespeople who show high levels of this CQ dimension to adapt to the cross-cultural selling challenges[20]. Chen *et al.* (2012) argue that, compared to other CQ dimensions, motivational CQ is a better predictor of employee cross-cultural task performance. Chen *et al.* (2012) develop their theory by establishing employees' motivational CQ as a primary determinant of employee cultural sales. The reasons why, according to them, motivational CQ would help achieve high cultural sales are as follows: first, motivational CQ enhances employees' cultural adjustment; second, individuals with high motivational CQ are effective negotiators in cross-cultural transactions.

Thus, it is expected that these individuals will show greater interest in learning and observing their foreign clients' communication styles, negotiation tactics and criteria in evaluating good or bad deals. Consequently, individuals with high motivational CQ will more easily understand their counterparts' cultural backgrounds and identify a common ground on which to establish personal

[19] X. CHEN *et al.* (2012, p. 95).

[20] L. VAN DYNE *et al.* (2010, p. 135).

connections, and drawing necessary resources to overcome barriers: "employees with higher motivational CQ will likely be more successful in making adjustments, understanding cultural similarities and differences, and negotiating with culturally diverse individuals" [21]. Therefore, according to Chen *et al.* (2012), a salesperson's motivational CQ appears to be positively related to his or her cultural sales. In particular, the findings of their empirical research, conducted among 305 real estate agents from the U.S.A., suggest that motivational CQ is a significant predictor of cultural sales, rather than of any sales. In fact, auxiliary analyses were conducted in order to test whether the model could also be supported with individual total sales – a noncultural sales measure of employee performance – but the results showed that individual motivational CQ was not significantly related to individual total sales[22].

Even though Chen *et al.* (2012) developed their theory by establishing that employees' motivational CQ is the primary determinant of employee cultural sales, in their research, they also considered *firm motivational CQ*[23] as an aspect that could have an influence on individual's motivational CQ. According to them, indeed, firm motivational CQ together with firm diversity climate may impact on the

[21] X. CHEN *et al.* (2012, p. 95).

[22] *Ivi*, p. 100.

[23] "*Firm motivational CQ is the firm's capacity to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning effectively in cross-cultural situations*", X. CHEN *et al.* (2012, p. 96).

relationship between individual CQ and their intercultural task performance. In accordance with the trait activation theory, in fact, the functioning of an individual disposition – in this case, motivational CQ – is strengthened when the organizational context is receptive to that disposition[24] (see Figure 3).

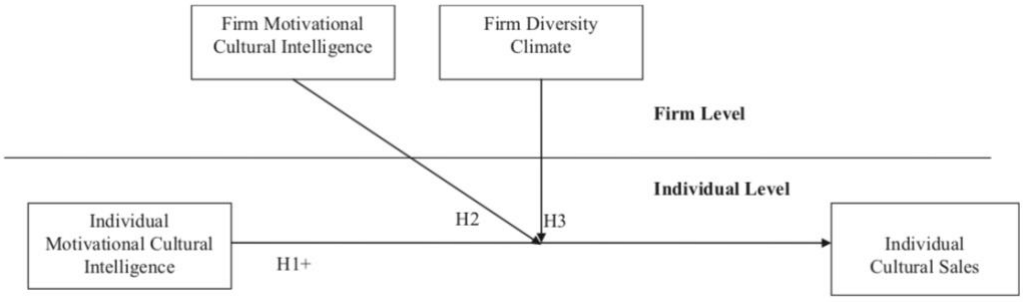

Figure 3. Theoretical model. Source: Chen *et al.* (2012, p. 94).

When "in presence of high firm motivational CQ, employees will be exposed to contextual cues, indicating that their firms are interested in cross-cultural business opportunities and strive for developing a collective knowledge base and allocating resources for employees to effectively deal with complex cultural problems"[25].

[24] R.P. TETT & D.D. BURNETT, *A personality trait-based interactionist model of job performance*, "Journal of Applied Psychology", vol. 88, 2003, pp. 500-517; quoted by X. CHEN *et al.* (2012, p. 96).

[25] X. CHEN *et al.* (2012, p. 96).

According to Chen, high firm motivational CQ will, therefore, enhance the relationship between an individual's motivational CQ and their cultural sales.

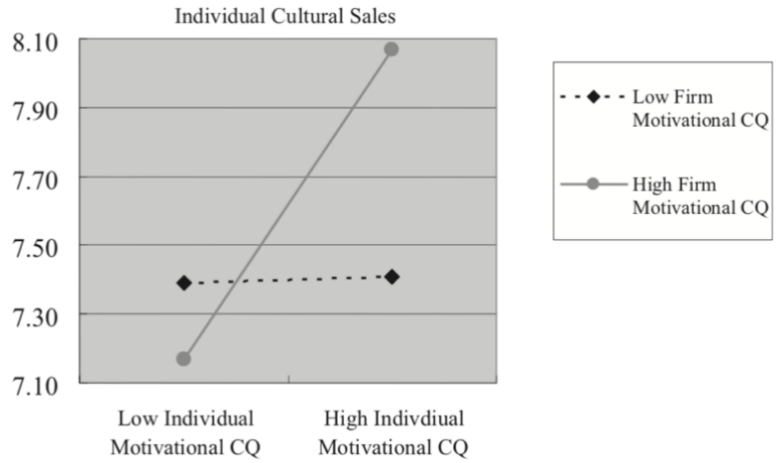

Figure 4. The two-way interactive effect of individual motivational CQ and firm motivational climate on individual cultural sales. CQ = cultural intelligence. Source: X. Chen *et al.* (2012, p. 101).

While Chen *et al.* (2012) showed that firm-level motivational CQ enhances the relationship between individual-level motivational CQ and individual cultural sales, Ramsey *et al.* (2016)[26] suggest that unit-level cultural intelligence and global mindset (GM) – a way of approaching the world and a tendency to scan from a

[26] J.R. RAMSEY *et al.* (2016, p. 107).

broader perspective[27] – will positively impact on unit-level commitment and performance, respectively. Both CQ and GM are based on the transformative learning theory[28]: transformative learning is defined as the process of effective change in a frame of reference. Through experience, values and feelings, individuals define a specific frame of reference through which they view the world, and the ability to reshape one's frame in a cross-cultural context is important to individuals with either CQ or GM[29].

In supporting their thesis, Ramsey *et al.* (2016) assert that "individuals who work together, not only interact on a daily basis but also intentionally or unintentionally learn from each other by exchanging ideas, information, experiences and knowledge, meaning that it is the interaction of individuals within a unit that builds

27 K.M. SRINIVAS, *Globalization of business and the third world*, "Journal of Management Development", vol. 14, no. 3, 1995, pp. 26-49; quoted by J.R. RAMSEY *et al.* (2016, p. 107).

28 J. MEZIROW, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Jossey-Bass, 1991, San Francisco, CA.; J. MEZIROW, *Transformative learning: theory to practice*, "New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education", vol. 74, 1997, pp. 5-12; quoted by J.R. RAMSEY *et al.* (2016, p. 107).

29 J.R. RAMSEY *et al.* (2016, p. 111).

unit level KSAs"[30, 31]. In line with Chen *et al.* (2012), Ramsey *et al.* (2016) state that unit-level CQ can be achieved through a bottom-up process, in which individuals' CQ (or GM) can transfer into unit CQ (or GM capital)[32]. This process can take place in two different ways: a horizontal peer-to-peer exchange and a vertical exchange. In the first case, the transfer happens when employees share ideas, resources and attitudes regarding their personal cross-cultural experience; by doing so, employees' confidence and interest in dealing with cross-cultural issues are strengthened and the creation of collective knowledge (in terms of unit CQ capital) is facilitated. In the second case, employees "seek advice from, make suggestions to and ask for resources and support from their supervisors or leaders"[33]. By doing so, employees' CQ stimulates their supervisors and leaders' CQ, thus encouraging culture-related learning and training processes across the

30 In discussing their theory, Ramsey *et al.* (2016) first map each of the components of CQ onto the KSAs[30] framework. First, the differences between knowledge, skills and abilities are explained: knowledge is the understanding of a subject, skills are proficiencies learned through experience and training; abilities are the qualities of being able to do something, and are often considered innate. Since it is more innate than a skill, metacognitive CQ can be included in the ability part of KSAs, the cognitive portion of CQ falls under the knowledge and skill parts of KSAs, motivational CQ is tied to the skills and ability part of KSAs while the behavioral dimension of CQ refers to the skills part of KSAs.

31 J.R. RAMSEY *et al.* (2016, p. 114).

32 Cfr. The two-way interactive effect of individual motivational CQ and firm motivational climate on individual cultural sales., X. CHEN, D. LIU, D. & R. PORTNOY (2012).

33 *Ibidem*.

unit. Therefore, it is proposed that individual-level cultural intelligence emerges as a business-unit cultural intelligence capital.

As previously suggested by Chen *et al.* (2012), linking unit-level KSAs capital to pertinent unit-level outcomes, specifically commitment and performance, suggests that it is critical to provide an environment that allows interaction among the individuals: without it, CQ capital will not emerge. Aggregate human capital (KSAs) at the business unit or organizational levels contributes to an increase in commitment and eventually superior performance for the business unit or organization.

In reference to cultural intelligence implications on sales performance, Bechter and Swierczek (2015)[34] come to the following conclusion: if, on the one hand, cultural distance and cultural intelligence are key factors in order to achieve successful outcomes, on the other hand, cultural intelligence is not a sufficient predictor of sales negotiation outcome. In their research, they assess how cultural distance, cultural intelligence and adaptive behaviors influence sales negotiations outcomes: Global Executive MBA participants were asked to specify their own sales experiences in digital stories which described an actual negotiation process they were involved in. The findings confirmed that, in order to be effective in cross-cultural negotiation situations, salespersons have to be aware of cultural distance

[34] C. BECHTER & F.W. SWIERCZEK (2015, pp. 165-178).

and context (distinguishing between high, medium or low context cultures[35]). Moreover, essential to achieve a win-win result is the flexibility of the negotiation style: if participants are inflexible, any sales negotiation will fail. Cultural intelligence, on the other side, turned out not to be significantly related to negotiation outcomes, except for the motivational CQ "adjustment"[36]: it is important for salespeople involved in cross-cultural situations to recognize their partners' cultural and negotiating style and be able to adjust their approach to achieve the most effective outcome.

With this regard, while no significant relation was found between behavioral CQ and cultural adjustment, Jyoti and Kour (2013)'s research findings[37] show that motivational CQ, in fact, significantly influences general, work and interaction adjustment, as it helps managers feel motivated to experience new culturally diverse situations and have confidence in their abilities to adjust to general environment as well as with people around. In their research, they investigate Indian organizations, which are multicultural in nature, in order to analyze the impact of cultural intelligence on task performance and the mediating role of cultural adjustment. The

35 Cfr. E.T. HALL, *Beyond Culture*, Doubleday, 1976, New York; quoted by C. BECHTER & F.W. SWIERCZEK (2015).

36 Cfr. X. CHEN *et al.* (2012, p. 95): *"employees with higher motivational CQ will likely be more successful in making adjustments"*.

37 J. JYOTI & S. KOUR (2015, p. 251).

study reveals that cultural intelligence positively contributes to task performance and that culturally intelligent individuals are better able to adjust themselves in cross-cultural situations, thus leading to higher performance. Cultural intelligence appears to be particularly relevant in the Indian context, as India is a culturally diversified country, *i.e.* in terms of race, gender, age, color, ethnicity and religion: customs and traditions differ across different states and religions. It is not uncommon that employees with different cultural backgrounds work together in the same organization, thus increasing the complexity and ambiguity of communication. In this perspective, cultural intelligence is a tool that can help managers handle cultural diversity and deal with unfamiliar cross-cultural situations.

2.2. The effectiveness of cultural intelligence in real cross-cultural selling settings

Although some previous research[38] explored the role played by CQ on students in cross-cultural selling situations – *i.e.* Delpechitre and Baker (2017), Bechter and

[38] High cognitive, metacognitive, motivational and behavioral CQ are positively related to a high propensity for ASB between a buyer-seller relationship *(Delpechitre, & Baker, 2017)*.

Swierczek (2015)[39] – the effectiveness of CQ in real cross-cultural selling settings still has to be proven. In order to do so, Charoensukmongkol (2019) investigates the contribution of cultural intelligence to adaptive selling behaviors and international sales performance of salespeople who were assigned to work at international trade shows in foreign countries. In particular, he considers the mediating role of adaptive selling behaviors (ASB) as a variable to explain why high-CQ salespeople demonstrate more effective sales performance in cross-cultural settings.

According to Charoensukmongkol (2019), in fact, prior research lacks a solid theoretical explanation of why CQ actually enhances salespeople's effectiveness in cross-cultural selling situations. Moreover, even though some previous research supports the direct contribution of CQ to cross-cultural selling performance, he asserts that other characteristics of individuals could play a facilitating role in making salespeople's performance more effective. Thus, in his work, he proposes a theoretical explanation to support why CQ should be integrated with other competencies, with a specific reference to trait mindfulness.

[39] Cultural intelligence is not a sufficient predictor of sales negotiation outcomes (*Bechter & Swierczek, 2015*).

Charoensukmongkol (2019)'s research builds on the categorization theory in the area of personal selling[40] – as proposed by Román and Iacobucci (2010) – and on cognitive resource theory (Fiedler, 1986, 1995)[41].

Categorization theory[42] is used to explain the motivation of salespeople to display adaptive selling behaviors (ASB). According to this theory, categorization is a primary human function that can help individuals simplify complex stimulus environments. In the same way, according to Charoensukmongkol (2019), CQ might help salespeople categorize foreign customers to reduce complexity in cross-cultural selling environments.

Cognitive resource theory is used to explore some facilitating conditions that might enhance the influence of CQ on adaptive selling behaviors. Pursuant to the theory,

40 S. ROMÁN & D. IACOBUCCI, *Antecedents and consequences of adaptive selling confidence and behavior: A dyadic analysis of salespeople and their customers*, "Journal of Academy of Marketing Science", vol. 38, no. 3, 2010, pp. 363-382.

41 F.E. FIEDLER, *The contribution of cognitive resources and leader behavior to organizational performance*, "Journal of Applied Social Psychology", vol. 16, no. 6, 1986, pp. 532-548.

F.E. FIEDLER, *Cognitive resources and leadership performance*, "Applied Psychology", vol. 44, no. 1, 1995, pp. 5-28.

42 "Categorization is a basic human function that helps simplify complex stimulus environments, such as our interactions with other people. In selling, categories enable the salespeople to structure incoming data on customers so as to categorize or "qualify" them; e.g., the salesperson decides whether the candidate is a prime customer or a prospect of lesser purchase potential. A customer typology can help a salesperson predict the customer's likely behavior, by assuming the customers of a certain type will behave in a manner consistent with that of other, similar category members" (*Román & Iacobucci*, 2010, p. 368).

intelligence is fundamental for individuals in order to perform a task effectively, but other conditions are necessary for individuals to optimize the performance outcome[43]. Given the complexity of adaptive behaviors in cross-cultural selling, the author suggests that "the role of CQ might need to be supported by some other cognitive resource to help salespeople engage in adaptive selling behaviors more effectively"[44].

Hence, Charoensukmongkol (2019) attempts to fill this gap in literature by considering the role of trait[45] mindfulness as a characteristic that might enable salespeople to make more effective use of their CQ as they engage in cross-cultural sales adaptation. In his work he draws the definition of mindfulness from Brown and Ryan (2003): "mindfulness represents the ability to focus one's attention on

[43] S.E. MURPHY, D. BLYTH & F.E. FIEDLER, *Cognitive resource theory and the utilization of the leader's and group members' technical competence,* "The Leadership Quarterly", vol. 3, no. 3, 1992, pp. 237-255; R.P. VECCHIO, *Theoretical and empirical examination of cognitive resource theory*, "Journal of Applied Psychology", vol. 75, no. 2, 1990, pp. 141-147; quoted by P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 3).

[44] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 3).

[45] "A trait is considered to be something that is part of an individual's personality and therefore a long-term characteristic of an individual that shows through their behaviour, actions and feelings. It seen as being a characteristic, feature or quality of an individual. For example, someone who says 'I am a confident person' or 'I am just an anxious person' is stating that is these attributes are part of who they are. A state on the other hand is a temporary condition that they are experiencing for a short period of time. After the state has passes they will return to another condition. For example someone who says 'I am feeling quite confident about this interview' or 'I feel nervous about doing this' are describing states", The Oxford Review, *Encyclopaedia of Terms*, viewed 23 January 2020, https://www.oxford-review.com/oxford-review-encyclopaedia-terms/the-difference-between-an-state-and-a-trait/.

moment-to-moment experiences and to be aware of stimuli that produce particular sensations"[46].

Since mindfulness reflects a high cognitive ability of individuals, it could be considered as a cognitive resource to be integrated with CQ in order to enhance salespeople's information-processing capability and helping them demonstrate more effective adaptive selling behaviors in cross-cultural situations. Thus, Charoensukmongkol (2019) focuses his research on whether salespeople with high degrees of CQ and trait mindfulness could demonstrate adaptive selling behaviors more effectively than individuals with high CQ but low levels of trait mindfulness.

2.2.1. CQ and adaptive selling behaviors

Charoensukmongkol (2019) focuses his research on the impact of CQ in helping salespeople demonstrate effective adaptive selling behaviors when interacting with culturally diverse customers.

Adaptive selling behavior is defined as "the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation"[47], it represents the ability of

[46] K.W. BROWN & R.M. RYAN, *The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being,* "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", vol. 84, no. 4, 2003, pp. 822-848.

[47] B.A. WEITZ, H. SUJAN, M. & SUJAN, *Knowledge, motivation, and adaptive behavior: A framework for improving selling effectiveness*, "Journal of Marketing", vol. 1, no. 10, 1986, p. 175.

salespeople to adjust their sales strategies and communications to align with different customers[48]. Moreover, Spiro and Weitz (1990), hypothesize that the practice of adaptive selling behaviors results in better sales performance[49]. Salespeople show high levels of ASB when they use unique sales presentations and alter their behavior according to the customer they interact with, while they show a low level of ASB when they use the same sales presentation during all sales interactions. Indeed, adaptive selling behaviors can be effective or ineffective, depending on the nature of the selling environment and on the selling capabilities of the salespeople involved. Therefore, to demonstrate effective adaptive selling behaviors and achieve higher performances, it is necessary for salespeople to perceive signals from the buyer: these include both verbal and non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions, body language and tone of voice.[50]

The role of adaptive selling behaviors on sales performance was already examined by Delpechitre and Baker (2017) using the role-play performance technique in an advanced personal selling course in a public university located in the southern region of the United States. After collecting data from 151 students over a period

[48] R.L. SPIRO & B.A. Weitz*, Adaptive Selling: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Nomological Validity,* "Journal of Marketing Research", vol. 27, no. 1, 1990, pp. 61–69.

[49] Empirical support for this hypothesis is provided by Sujan and Weitz (1986), who found a significant relationship between "working smarter" and performance. "Working smarter" was operationalized as the practice of adaptive selling.

[50] B.A. WEITZ *et al.* (1986).

of six semesters, the results showed a significant positive relationship between metacognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ, behavioral CQ – that altogether compose the CQ concept – and adaptive selling behaviors. The aim of the study was to examine the influence of sales students CQ on their ASB and the results showed the important role played by CQ in cross-cultural settings. Along with emphasizing the importance of incorporating CQ into sales courses, it also highlighted the fact that students who possess high levels of cultural intelligence are better able to adapt to cross-cultural selling environment and hence were able to understand their customer needs, build better relationships with them and, above all, to perform at a higher level during their sales role-play performance (see Figure 5). Thus, they reach the conclusion that students with high levels of CQ are positively related to a high propensity for ASB in buyer-seller relationships and are therefore able to achieve better sales performances.[51].

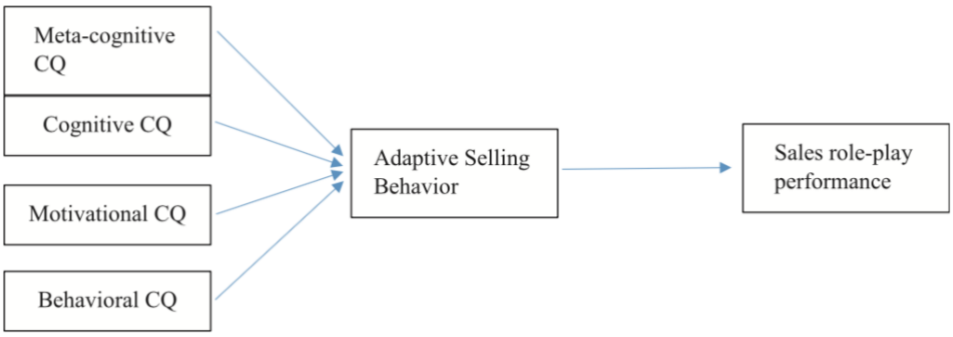

Figure 5. Conceptual framework. Source: Delpechitre and Baker (2017, p. 5).

[51] D. DELPECHITRE & D.S. BAKER (2017, p. 10).

As stated earlier, in the attempt to fill a gap in literature, Charoensukmongkol (2019) focuses his research on the role of adaptive selling behavior in real cross-cultural selling settings: in fact, he states that "adaptive selling behaviors can be even more crucial when salespeople interact with consumers from foreign cultures, whose attitudes and behaviors might differ significantly from those of local consumers. Successful engagement in adaptive selling behaviors with foreign consumers requires salespeople to have a thorough understanding of foreign cultures, the ability to anticipate the needs and requirements of foreign consumers, and knowledge about how to react to meet their cultural expectations. Such unique characteristics often appear in salespeople with a high CQ"[52].

Since prior research already demonstrated that high levels of CQ are positively related to a high propensity for ASB in buyer-seller relationships (*e.g.*, Delpechitre & Baker, 2017), Charoensukmongkol (2019) hypothesizes that:

> H1: There is a positive relationship between CQ and ASB.
>
> H2: ASB mediates the positive relationship between CQ and international sales performance.

[52] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 4).

2.2.2. CQ and trait mindfulness

As previously stated, in his research Charoensukmongkol (2019) considers the role of trait mindfulness as a characteristic that might play a facilitating role in making salespeople using their CQ in a more effective way, while engaging in cross-cultural sales adaptation.

Mindfulness is a concept that draws from the Eastern spiritual tradition of meditation; "it has roots in Buddhist and other contemplative traditions where conscious attention and awareness are actively cultivated. It is most commonly defined as the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present"[53]: it is essentially a heightened awareness of and enhanced attention to current experience or present reality[54].

Charoensukmongkol (2019), in particular, focuses his attention on trait mindfulness: as a trait, it refers to a characteristic of personality which is quite persistent across different times and situations, and it also represents the ability of individuals to be mindful on a daily basis: having strong mindfulness qualities is therefore part of one's nature[55].

[53] K.W. BROWN & R.M. RYAN, (2003, p. 822).

[54] *Ibidem*.

[55] *Ivi*, p. 836.

The first to highlight the central role played by mindfulness in CQ was Thomas (2006)[56]. According to his theory, CQ is composed of three dimensions, presented as an interrelated system, where he explicitly introduces the concept of mindfulness as a key component that links knowledge and action (Figure 6).

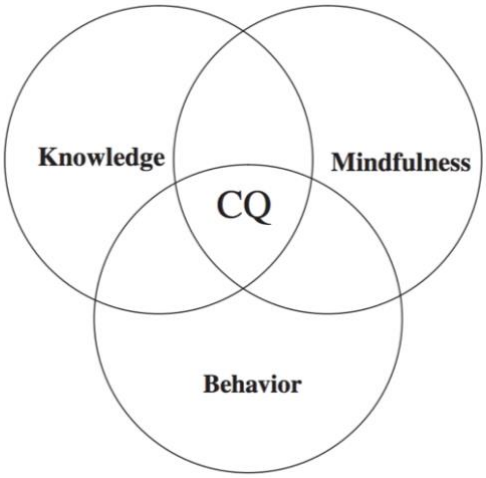

Figure 6. Components of CQ. Source: Thomas (2006, p. 81).

In his conceptualization, mindfulness is defined as a specific metacognitive strategy "that regulates cognition and focuses attention on the knowledge of culture and the process of cultural influence, as well as on an individual's motives, goals, emotions

[56] D.C. THOMAS, *Domain and Development of Cultural Intelligence The Importance of Mindfulness*, "Group & Organization Management" , vol. 31, no. 1, 2006, pp. 78-99.

and external stimuli"[57]. Hence, mindfulness enables individuals "to consider a range of behavioral options based on knowledge of how cultures vary and how culture affects behavior"[58]. Furthermore, when discussing CQ development, Thomas states that the process can be quite slow and it requires learning from social experience: this means reflectively paying attention to and appreciating critical differences among cultures. In this context, mindful attention is crucial for the learning process: mindfulness is, therefore, an essential characteristic that supports individuals in CQ development. According to Tuleja (2014), mindfulness involves a process of cultural sense-making, that allows people to make sense of cultural situations, events and actions within individuals' frame of reference by removing a rigid or fixed mindset, thereby opening them up to new knowledge when engaging in cross-cultural interactions[59].

Therefore, in line with the literature (Thomas, 2006; Tuleja, 2014), trait mindfulness is a personality characteristic that enables high-CQ salespeople to be more attentive in cultural learning during cross-cultural interactions. Charoensukmongkol (2019) argues that high-CQ salespeople who also possess high levels of trait mindfulness are expected to be more effective when utilizing their

[57] *Ivi*, p. 86.

[58] *Ibidem*.

[59] E. TULEJA, *Developing Cultural Intelligence for Global Leadership Through Reflection*, "Journal of Teaching in International Business", vol. 5, 2014, p 7.

CQ to demonstrate adaptive selling behaviors as they interact with foreign customers, than salespeople who possess low levels of trait mindfulness. It is the cognitive resource theory[60] that can explain the relevance of mindfulness in supporting the effective use of CQ on adaptive selling behaviors. In fact, being able to display adaptive selling behaviors in cross-cultural settings is a complex task that requires the cognitive abilities to process information about the selling situation and the prospective customer. Indeed, while CQ is an aspect of intelligence that simplifies adaptive selling behaviors, other cognitive abilities might be helpful to support salespeople in information processing. In this regard, Charoensukmongkol (2019) hypothesizes:

> H3: The level of trait mindfulness moderates the positive relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors.

2.2.3. Empirical model: Charoensukmongkol (2019)

In his study, Charoensukmongkol (2019) analyzes "the contribution of the relative levels of CQ of salespeople to their adaptive selling behaviors, by considering the moderating effect of trait mindfulness"[61] (see Figure 7).

[60] F.E. FIEDLER (1986, 1995).

[61] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 11).

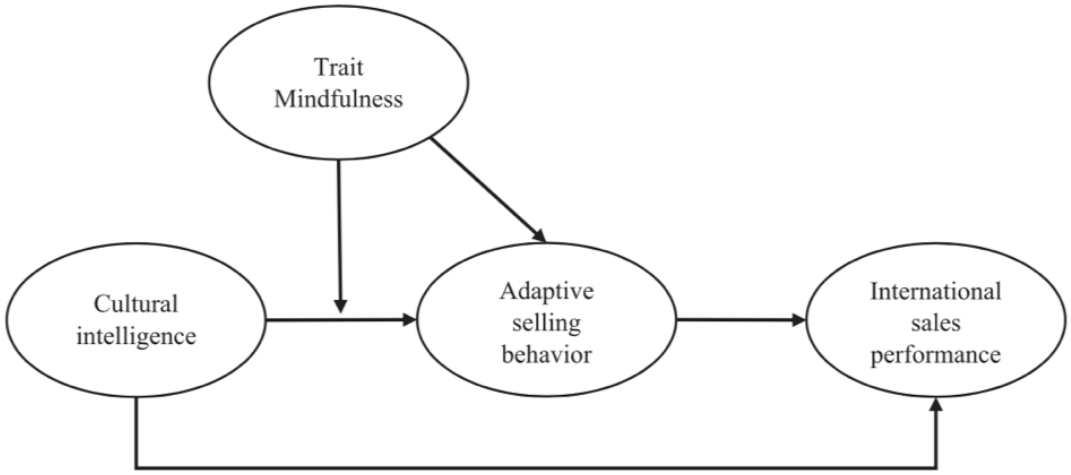

Figure 7. Conceptual model. Source: Charoensukmongkol (2019, p. 8).

To validate his hypotheses – H1, H2, H3 – Charoensukmongkol conducted a quantitative empirical research, collecting data from 365 Thai salespeople, who were sent by their companies as sales representatives at international trade shows in foreign countries. Data were collected during three different trade shows – precisely in Vietnam, Japan and India – which took place between June and August 2017. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed (160 in India, 120 in Japan and 120 in Vietnam); of this total, 365 usable questionnaires were obtained at the end of the period of data collection.

The four dimensions presented in the conceptual model – CQ, ASB, trait mindfulness and international sales performance – were assessed using the following measurements (see Appendix A):

- CQ: Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), developed by Ang *et al.* (2007)[62] and measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale consists of 20 items with four sub-scales, which evaluate each CQ dimension: cognitive (six items), metacognitive (four items), motivational (five items) and behavioral (five items).
- ASB: ADAPTS scale, developed by Spiro and Weitz (1990)[63] and consisting of 5 items and measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
- Trait mindfulness: Mindfulness Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS), developed by Brown and Ryan (2003)[64] and measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost always) to 5 (almost never). The scale consists of 15 questions and a low score represents a low level of mindfulness.
- International sales performance: self-assessed by salespeople by means of the standardized scale used by sales organizations in Thailand (the objective

62 S. ANG, L. VAN DYNE, C. KOH, K.Y. NG, K.J. TEMPLER, C. TAY, & N.A. CHANDRASEKAR, *Cultural intelligence: Its measurement and effects on cultural judgement and decision making cultural adaptation and task performance*, "Management and Organization Review", vol. 3, no. 3, 2007, pp. 335–371.

63 R.L. SPIRO & B.A. WEITZ, (1990).

64 K.W. BROWN & R.M. RYAN (2003).

performance from company records could not be obtained due to privacy issues). Each scale was measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

Age, gender, education level, international sales experience (number of times that the respondents have been assigned to work at the trade show in the target country) and product knowledge were included as control variables, as they could impact on adaptive selling behaviors. Product knowledge was evaluated by means of the three-item scale developed by Babakus, Cravens, Grant, Ingram and LaForge (1996)[65], using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data were analyzed using partial least squares (PLS) regression, a statistical method that does not require data to be normally distributed and requires smaller sample sizes (results are shown in Table 5 and Figure 8).

65 E. BABAKUS, D.W. CRAVENS, K. GRANT, T.N. INGRAM & R.W. LAFORGE, *Investigating the relationships among sales, management control, sales territory design, salesperson performance, and sales organization effectiveness*, "International Journal of Research in Marketing", vol. 13, no. 4, 1996, pp. 345–363.

Table 5. Correlation among variables and square root of average variance extracted. Source: Charoensukmongkol (2019, p. 9).

Variables	Cronbach's alpha coefficient	Composite eliability coefficient	CQ	TMF	ASB	PK	ISP	AGE	GEN	EDU	SE
CQ	.777	.859	(.782)	.084	.512**	.536**	.334**	−.079	.027	.159**	−.019
TMF	.865	.889		(.595)	.101	.225**	.117*	.07	.052	.025	.109*
ASB	.887	.917			(.830)	.662**	.424**	.022	.036	.091	−.008
PK	.931	.956				(.937)	.408**	−.01	−.008	.12	−.067
ISP	.872	.908					(.814)	−.061	.047	.1*	.114
AGE	n/a	n/a						(1)	−.006	.03	.225**
GEN	n/a	n/a							(1)	−.023	.044
EDU	n/a	n/a								(1)	−.014
SE	n/a	n/a									(1)

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.
Square roots of average variance extracted of latent variables are shown in the parentheses.
CQ = cultural intelligence, TMF = trait mindfulness, ASB = adaptive selling behavior, PK = product knowledge.
ISP = international sales performance, AGE = age, GEN = gender dummy variable (male = 1; female = 0), EDU = education, SE = sales experience.

The analysis showed that all of the hypotheses were supported: the results revealed a positive relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors, therefore hypothesis 1 was supported; the results confirmed a positive relationship between CQ and international sales performance, therefore hypothesis 2 was supported; finally, the results supported a positive interaction between CQ and trait mindfulness: that means that "the positive relationship between CQ and adaptive selling was stronger for salespeople with high levels of trait mindfulness than those with low levels of trait mindfulness"[66] (see Figure 9).

[66] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 11).

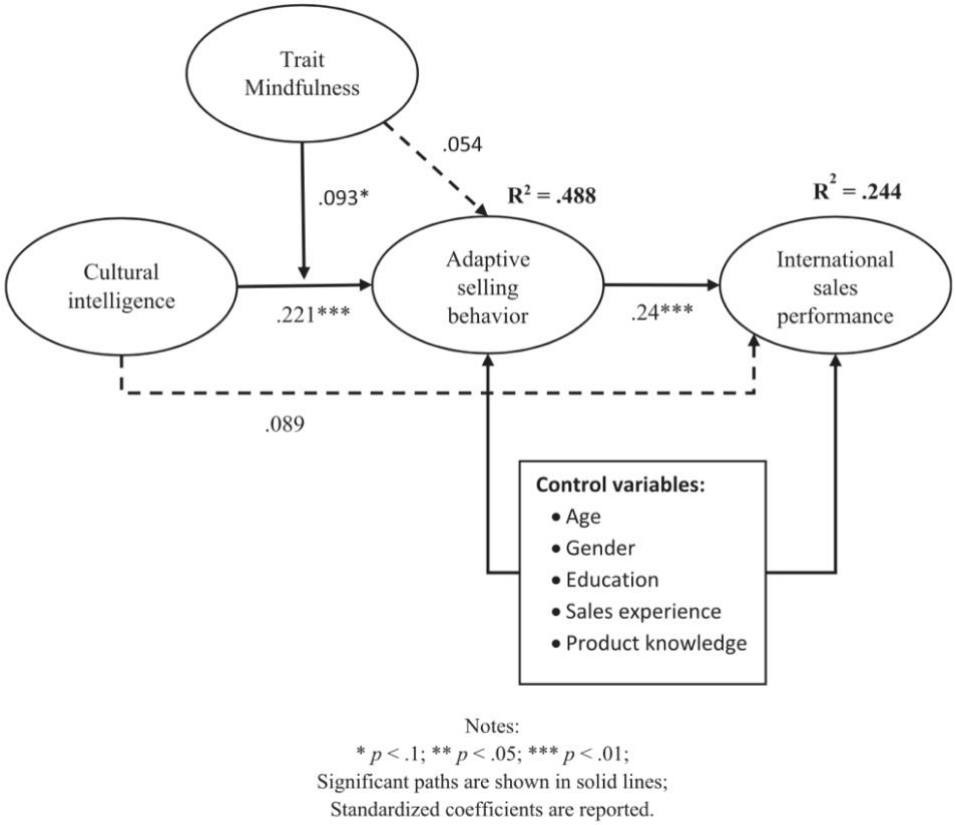

Figure 8. Results from PLS regression analysis. Source: Charoensukmongkol (2019, p. 10).

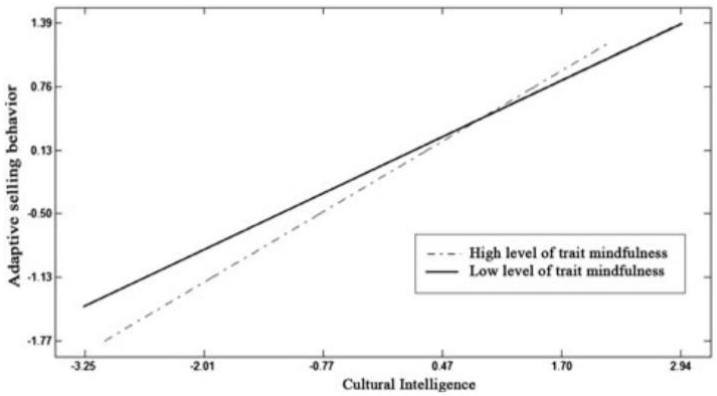

Figure 9. Moderating effect. Source: Charoensukmongkol (2019, p. 11).

With regard to the control variables, product knowledge was found to be positively correlated with adaptive selling behavior and sales performance; age negatively correlates with sales performance while sales experience positively correlates with sales performance. Other control variables were not statistically significant.

The results of the research, therefore, demonstrated that salespeople who are high in CQ are able to show high adaptive selling behaviors while engaging in interactions with foreign customers: there is a positive association between CQ and adaptive selling behavior, moderated by the relative level of trait mindfulness of the individual. Moreover, the positive association between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors was positively associated with international sales performance in salespeople with high levels of trait mindfulness. Even though the results did not show a direct relationship between CQ and international sales performance, the relationship proved to be significantly mediated by adaptive selling behaviors.

Trait mindfulness and CQ resulted to be positively related, although the relationship between them is not significant ($r = .084$; $p = .108$), meaning that the sample of salespeople with high levels of CQ did not necessarily possess a high level of mindfulness.

The weak positive correlation between trait mindfulness and adaptive selling behavior ($r = .101$; $p = .054$) shows that trait mindfulness alone is not a sufficient condition for salespeople to demonstrate higher degrees of adaptive selling

behaviors. Nonetheless, the sample of salespeople with high levels of both CQ and trait mindfulness showed a higher degree of adaptive selling behaviors compared to salespeople with high CQ but with lower levels of trait mindfulness.

Charoensukmongkol (2019)[67] suggests that the results regarding the positive contribution of CQ to adaptive selling behaviors are in line with previous research, which investigated the implications of CQ in cross-cultural sales and the influence of CQ in helping salespeople to effectively adapt their selling behaviors. In fact, the result confirmed that salespeople with higher degrees of CQ are more likely to show higher levels of adaptive selling behaviors, as suggested by Pandey and Charoensukmongkol (2019)[68]. Moreover, the results confirm the importance of CQ in cross-cultural selling jobs, as previously proposed by Delpechitre and Baker (2017)[69], whose research explored the role of CQ among sales students who engaged in cross-cultural selling in a classroom setting. Furthermore, the results regarding the moderating effect analysis, according to which trait mindfulness amplified the positive relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behavior,

[67] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, pp. 11-12).

[68] A. PANDEY & P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 79).

[69] D. DELPECHITRE & D.S. BAKER (2017, pp. 9-10).

conforms to Thomas *et. al* (2008)[70] and Tuleja (2014)[71], since they formerly proposed trait mindfulness as a personal characteristic that allows individuals to utilize CQ to enhance cross-cultural performance.

Charoensukmongkol (2019) states that the result of his empirical research, pursuant to which CQ has an influence on adaptive selling behavior and sales performance of Thai salespeople in international trade shows, "provides additional support regarding the benefits of CQ in cross-cultural selling, which is the occupational context that did not receive adequate evidence in the CQ literature": indeed, he continues, "the data collected from salespeople at trade shows in foreign countries reflect a relevant context of cross-cultural selling provides stronger justification for the role of CQ in helping salespeople interact effectively with diverse customers in a foreign environment" [72].

In summary, the results show that even though salespeople possess good levels of CQ, that could be insufficient in order to maximize their cross-cultural performance: other personal characteristics, such as trait mindfulness, could be important for salespeople to make effective use of their cultural intelligence.

[70] D.C. THOMAS (2008, p. 94).

[71] E. TULEJA (2014, pp. 10-11).

[72] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL (2019, p. 12).

In the present work, the above empirical model – that draws from Charoensukmongkol (2019) – will be employed as a basis for the development of the empirical research which will be described in detail in the following Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have discussed how there is a gap in literature regarding the influence of cultural intelligence in real cross-cultural selling settings.

In Chapter 3, an empirical analysis is conducted among sales managers of B2B firms, in order to investigate their point of view about three macro-themes that have been identified as follows: cultural intelligence, adaptive selling behavior and trait mindfulness. The reference model for developing the empirical research is the one presented by Charoensukmongkol (2019)[1], which aims to demonstrate the contribution of cultural intelligence to adaptive selling behaviors and international sales performance in cross-cultural settings and the moderating effect of trait mindfulness.

1 P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *The Efficacy of Cultural Intelligence for Adaptive Selling Behaviors in Cross-Cultural Selling: The Moderating Effect of Trait Mindfulness*, "Journal of Global Marketing", 2019.

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Model adaptation

The reference model for the empirical research draws from Charoensukmongkol (2019). He conducts his study among Thai salespeople, who were sent by their companies as representatives at international trade-shows in foreign countries. He distributes questionnaire surveys in order to evaluate cultural intelligence, adaptive selling behavior and trait mindfulness using the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)[2], the ADAPTS scale[3], the Mindfulness Attention and Awareness Scale (MAAS)[4] respectively. Furthermore, international sales performance was self-assessed by salespeople using a standardized scale used by Thai sales organizations (scales are given in Appendix A).

The present work draws from Charoensukmongkol's model by developing an in-depth interview, a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspective on particular ideas, programs o situations. In-depth interviews are

2 S. ANG, L. VAN DYNE, C. KOH, K.Y. NG, K.J. TEMPLER, C. TAY, & N.A. CHANDRASEKAR, *Cultural intelligence: Its measurement and effects on cultural judgement and decision making cultural adaptation and task performance*, "Management and Organization Review", vol. 3, no. 3, 2007, pp. 335–371.

3 R.L. SPIRO & B.A. Weitz*, Adaptive Selling: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Nomological Validity,* "Journal of Marketing Research", vol. 27, no. 1, 1990, pp. 61–69.

4 K.W. BROWN & R.M. RYAN, *The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being,* "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", vol. 84, no. 4, 2003, pp. 822-848.

useful in order to obtain detailed information about one's thoughts and behaviors, or to investigate new issues in depth[5].

In this case, since the subject matter is relatively new and has been discussed to a limited extent in literature, the in-depth interview seemed to be the preferable option for the research purpose.

Based on the empirical model suggested by Charoensukmongkol (2019), the in-depth interview was developed. The interview guide contains an introduction (including informed consent), a set of questions and closing comments (see Table 6).

Table 6. In-depth interview guide. Source: own elaboration.

Introduction	The interview will be recorded. The information will be used for research purposes only and the data will be analyzed in an aggregated way. The study focuses on international sales at an organizational level, with particular attention to the relationship between the salesperson and the customer.

[5] C. BOYCE, & P.A. NEALE, *Conducting in-depth interviews: a guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input*, Pathfinder International Tool Series, Monitoring and Evaluating – 2, Pathfinder International, 2006.

Personal information	a. Age b. Gender c. Education level d. Role in the company e. International sales experience (years) f. Company type (products and markets)
Questions	1. In your opinion, what are the problems and challenges that salespeople have to face in the international arena? 2. According to you, what are the elements that might have an impact on international sales performance? 3. According to you, which elements might improve the approach toward an international customer? 4. Do you think that, in order to improve their approach, it is important for salespeople to know the culture of their interlocutor (*i.e.* in terms of traditions, language, laws, behaviors)? 5. Do you think that, in order to improve their approach, it is important for salespeople to change their behaviors, verbal and non-verbal, according to the culture of their customers?

	6. Do you think that, in order to improve his/her approach, it is important for salespeople to be interested in and motivated to know and interact with new cultures? 7. According to you, does salespeople's personality have an impact on performance? 8. According to you, can the ability to focus one's attention on moment-to-moment experiences, that is, to stay focused on "here and now", have an impact on salespeople's performance?
Closing comments	Is there anything more you would like to add? Thank you for your time.

The interview begins by presenting the justification and methodology of the study, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality of the respondent. Subsequently, interviewees were asked information regarding their age, gender, education level, role in the company, international sales experience (in terms of years), company type (in terms of products and markets).

Then, respondents were asked about a list of issues, using the presented questions as a guide for the interviewer (see Table 6).

When needed, in order to better understand their answers and add further information to their statements, interviewees were asked additional questions such as:

- "Would you give me an example?"
- "Can you elaborate on that idea?"
- "Would you explain that further?"
- "Is there anything else?"

The aim of the interview is to investigate the interviewees' point of view about cultural intelligence, adaptive selling behavior and mindfulness in relation to salespeople's performance in cross-cultural markets, by asking them to express their personal opinions about the abovementioned topics.

3.2.1. Sample and data collection

The interviews were carried out during the first two weeks of February 2020.

Data were collected from 4 sales managers, who were contacted via LinkedIn or thanks to mutual acquaintances. Sales managers were chosen over salespeople because they were considered representative of the sales area in their respective firms and therefore to obtain a broader view of the phenomenon. Respondents were chosen from Italian B2B firms, working with clients from all over the world and operating in the sector of beauty, entertainment, footwear and freight forwarding.

B2B firms were chosen over B2C ones in for consistency with the model of Charoensukmongkol (2019).

During the interviews, which took about fifteen minutes each, respondents were left free to express their ideas and invited to present examples and additional information when the answer did not seem exhaustive.

As shown in Table 7, all of the respondents are male. Most of them have long international sales experience (20-30 years), while one of them has just four years of professional experience. Two of the respondents have a high school diploma, while two have completed a Master's degree in Economics.

Table 7. Characteristics of the respondents. Source: own elaboration.

	Age	*Gender*	*Education level*	*International sales experience (years)*
A	50	male	Master's degree	20
B	29	male	Master's degree	4
C	47	male	High school diploma	20
D	57	male	High school diploma	30

3.2.2. Data analysis

Interviews, which were conducted via phone calls, were recorded and then transcribed in order to analyze the results.

Transcripts were printed out and then read through, in order to categorize common patterns and themes among the participants. Relevant pieces, such as phrases and

sentences, where labeled to underline recurring themes, opinions and beliefs, which were then categorized and traced back to the core issues of the study (international sales performance, cultural intelligence, adaptive selling behavior, and mindfulness).

3.3. Results

During the interviews, respondents' point of view about international sales performance, cultural intelligence, adaptive selling behavior and mindfulness were investigated (the representative quotes drawn from the in-depth interviews are given in Appendix B).

3.3.1. International sales performance

When asked about the elements that could influence international sales performance, different themes emerged. According to A, technological innovation is the key element in order to achieve high sales performance in the international markets, with a particular focus on eco-friendly materials and technological solutions, which allow the firm to achieve a competitive advantage over the competitors worldwide. Key factor according to B is brand recognition and the ability to create a network all over the world. He also highlights the importance of market knowledge, both technical and cultural. He states: «brand recognition in that

market is the first access key […], the ability to create connections in that market, having as many connections as possible, helps you to be effective in the final sale» then he adds: «knowledge of the market is very important, in some markets the problem is cultural». A similar statement was made by C, who emphasizes the importance of collecting information and gaining knowledge about the markets in which salespeople are going to operate by stating as follows: «before you even go to sell, try to know a little bit about the market which you try to interface with, […] the most important thing is to try to be prepared as much as possible». Finally, D states that, in order to successfully compete in the international arena, it is crucial to identify the right partner with whom establish a long-term relationship and to be able to understand the demands of the market and the future trends; he states: «finding a right partner is the most important thing, […] creating a long-term partnership […] you have to understand where the market goes, where the trends go».

Thus, the prevalent feeling of the respondents is that in order to effectively perform on the international market it is essential to listen to the market, considering both market trends, such as the demand for particular product types (*i.e.* eco-friendly and sustainable products) and market characteristics, in terms of technical and cultural issues. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that, even though the role of culture was not cited in the first question, it was explicitly mentioned by one respondent, who turns out to be the youngest one.

In none of the cases it was found that salespeople undergo cultural training: where training courses are made, they mainly concern product and market characteristics, in terms of competitors, market share and technical issues. In this regard, in fact, A affirms: «we do very quick training courses […], we have multi-product salespeople […] they aren't particularly technical».

3.3.2. Cultural intelligence

Cultural intelligence has been investigated through a series of questions, ranging from general to particular.

First, respondents were asked about the elements that, according to them, might improve salespeople approach towards an international customer. Then, they were asked to express their opinion about the importance of knowing the culture of their interlocutor (in terms of traditions, language, laws, behaviors), changing their behaviors – both verbal and nonverbal – and being interested in and motivated to know and interact with culturally diverse customers. Their answers were then analyzed and traced back to the four dimensions of cultural intelligence – metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral CQ.

Metacognitive CQ includes awareness, planning and checking[6]. Awareness refers to the ability to be in tune with what is going on in one's self and others[7]. All the participants proved to be aware of the existing cultural differences between themselves and their interlocutors and they all agreed that it is fundamental to know who you are interfacing with. In particular, A stated that it is essential to know your counterpart's culture and to be respectful of their traditions and needs, «especially when you are working with Muslim clients or of any other religion, with a particular attention in the relationship to their customs, their needs and their traditions», then he added: «you know you have to be careful of these things». As regards planning, it means taking the time to prepare for a cross-cultural encounter and anticipating how to approach the people, topic and situations[8]. This aspect is particularly stressed by respondent C, who states that preparation is fundamental in order to build a relationship and he recommends preparing before meeting a prospective customer: preparation […] makes the difference when building the relationship. […] when making a new contact, it would be good for you to arrive prepared». With regards to checking, which means monitoring what one does while engaging in

6 L. VAN DYNE, S. ANG & D. LIVERMORE, *Cultural intelligence: a pathway for leading in a rapidly globalizing world*. In "K.M. Hannum, B. Mc Feeters & L. Booysen (Eds.), Leadership across differences: cases and perspectives", San Francisco, CQ, Pfeiffer, 2010, p. 134.

7 *Ibidem.*

8 *Ivi,* p. 137

interactions to see whether the plans and expectations were appropriate, C suggests the importance of asking questions to the interlocutor if you want to be sure about your knowledge of your counterpart's culture: «knowledge is essential […], if you do not have a knowledge, […] [it is important to] ask some more questions».

Cognitive CQ reflects an individual's knowledge about cultures and cultural differences[9]. During the interviews, most of the respondents spontaneously gave examples of some differences they noted with other cultures. Most of the respondents proved to understand how cultural systems and cultural norms and values shape the way to do business in culturally diverse countries and were enthusiastic to present examples from their personal experience. For instance, A presented a typical situation where you take your client out to dinner; in this case, it is really important for the salespeople to be aware of particular diet restrictions deriving from religious issues: «if I take [a Turkish] client out to dinner and I offer him wine or pork meat, I am not particularly attentive of their needs and I would make him feel uncomfortable». B, for his part, talked about the different value that contracts have in Russia and Italy and also the differences in knowledge of the English language, which can lead to problems when it comes to negotiation. Other differences that emerged were related to project management: «in Italy, as well as in Germany, France and UK, there's a […] kind of timeline that we go for when we

[9] *Ivi*, p. 135-136.

carry out projects. If you go to the UAE it is totally different, you start from other points and then go explore things in a different way». Another religious issue was given as an example by C: in fact, because of the Jewish religion, in Israel the working week is Sunday to Thursday, while they work on Sundays. Therefore, C states that it is necessary to know at least the basic habits of the cultures you are interfacing with: «if you urgently call on a Friday, you know you are just being annoying because I could be in a time of prayer». D, in turn, was not able to present a specific example.

Motivational CQ refers to the salespeople's level of interest, motivation and confidence in cross-cultural encounters[10]. When asked about what features a salesperson should have, three out of the four of the respondents underlined the importance of being interested and motivated when meeting culturally diverse clients. According to A, a key feature of salespeople is their willingness to listen and dedicate time to their customers, while B suggests that a salesperson should always have «a fire, a flame that burns inside […]; motivation is everything, believing in your product and being willing to analyze the cultural market». Respondent C affirms that a fundamental trait of salespeople is their willingness to listen and learn as much as they can and their love of knowledge: «when you are dealing with people with different cultural and religious backgrounds, the great

[10] *Ivi*, p. 135.

thing is to listen to them», and «if you are not positive, if you are not motivated, you're already off on the wrong foot». For his part, D states that «human relationship comes first: if there is a good human relationship, the difference in culture is hardly seen».

Behavioral CQ refers to salespeople's capability for behavioral flexibility, which is their ability to change their verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting cross-culturally[11]. A, B and C demonstrated to be attentive in changing their behaviors when dealing with culturally diverse interlocutors. In particular, B was the one who demonstrated a higher degree of behavioral CQ, because he proved to be aware of the different way his culturally diverse interlocutors act, both verbally and nonverbally: «other countries have different ways of approaching, even with hand gesture or with the way of discussing […], we Italians have a very warm approach, while in other countries, such as the UAE or Asia, they have a somewhat more detached approach, and Germans too».

Respondent A suggested that it is essential to respect the different times and rhythms, and be ready to adapt to the cultural habits of their counterparts: for instance, he states that, when dealing with Muslims, the negotiation usually takes more time and involves chatting and drinking coffee together; the same theme emerges in answer C, who, in turn, highlights the importance respecting requests

[11] *Ivi*, p. 137.

and times when interacting with Israeli customers. D was the only one to affirm that «the relationship with people doesn't change much».

Overall, three of the four respondents showed good levels of all of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence. What emerged more are the cognitive and metacognitive dimensions, which are common to all of the four interviewees. On the other side, not everyone demonstrated the same level of motivational and behavioral CQ, which were more difficult to explore. In particular, D showed low levels of both motivational and behavioral CQ. Not only he was not able to present examples of behavioral flexibility when engaging in cross-cultural relationships, but also, he affirmed that often the cultural difference is hardly noticed.

3.3.3. Adaptive selling behavior

The prevalent feeling about adaptive selling behavior – "the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation"[12] – was that it is crucial for salespeople to understand who their interlocutors are and to adapt, according to what they perceive from the specific situation. B states that «a salesperson has to be multi-faced, understand who he is dealing with, analyze all

[12] B.A. WEITZ, H. SUJAN, M. & SUJAN, *Knowledge, motivation, and adaptive behavior: A framework for improving selling effectiveness*, "Journal of Marketing", vol. 1, no. 10, 1986, p. 175.

the elements of the discussion and, based on that, modify his approach […]. You cannot be the same person in all the selling situations. You have to adapt […] to your interlocutor». C emphasize how it is essential for the salespeople to adapt to every situation: «do not assume you can standardize everyone, if the customer perceives this, you are dead – commercially speaking – and you can be quickly replaced». Both C and D underline that a key factor is the ability of the salespeople to understand the needs of their customers, in order to understand what to leverage on and build a long-term relationship with them. In particular, when answering to the question, C presented adaptive selling behavior by using the tailor metaphor: «you are a tailor who makes clothes every day, you ship every day, but every single shipment is a different shipment that has a buttonhole further up, or a different color of a thing, or a different cut… you have to be ready to perceive what he [the customer] needs, what helps him cover any flaws, or what he likes most and satisfies him when he looks at himself in the mirror».

According to A, indeed, every negotiation involves human relationships, and it is, therefore, crucial to take care of every detail and way of being deriving from the peculiar selling situation: «irrespective of the type of product, […], these are always human relationships between a seller and a buyer […]. Any attention and care to detail, the relationship, the way of being, certainly helps [to improve the approach towards the customer]». All participants, thus, showed to agree on the importance of adapting one's selling behavior when interacting with different customers.

3.3.4. Mindfulness

Given its specificity and peculiarities, the concept of mindfulness was the most difficult to investigate during the in-depth interviews. Interviewees were first asked to describe the personality traits that, according to them, a salesperson should have in order to effectively perform on cross-cultural selling situations, then they were asked what their thoughts were with reference to the ability to focus one's attention on moment-to-moment experiences and to stay focused on "here and now" [13].

The prevalent feeling was that it is crucial for salespeople to stay focused during the whole negotiation process, to always keep in mind what goals have to be achieved and to concentrate on the interlocutor. As stated by A, in fact, «you always have to know the reason why you are going to that meeting», and then he adds that every encounter «requires continuous attention». A similar statement was made by B and C. According to B, you have to take a moment and make it yours: «you can't fail, it's here and now». For his part, C affirms that it is essential «to be focused on your customer, and making him feel he is the most important thing you have at the moment». Finally, D affirms that it is necessary for a salesperson to be focused during the negotiation, but it is always important to look forward to the market

13 K.W. BROWN & R.M. RYAN, *The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being,* "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", vol. 84, no. 4, 2003, pp. 822-848.

trends. Here too, D seems to value mindfulness less than the three other respondents.

3.4. Implications and limitations

3.4.1. Implications

The present study investigated sales managers' point of view regarding cultural intelligence, adaptive selling behaviors and mindfulness, in order to understand how these factors could have an impact on salespeople's international sales performance.

First, it is interesting to notice how the cultural issue is not the first aspect to be considered by the sales manager as a key element when discussing international selling. Most of the respondents, in fact, did not mention culture when asked about what they thought could influence international sales performance, and only considered this issue when specifically asked to reflect on it. On the other hand, the results of the study confirm the importance of CQ in cross-cultural selling jobs, as proposed by Baker and Delpechitre (2016)[14]: when explicitly asked, in fact, all respondents agreed about the importance of having at least a basic knowledge of

[14] D.S. BAKER & D. DELPECHITRE, *An innovative approach to teaching cultural intelligence in personal selling*, "Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education", vol. 24, no. 1, 2016, pp. 78-87.

the culture of their interlocutor, in order to be able to adapt to their requests and demands. This finding is consistent with categorization theory[15]: strong knowledge of various cultures helps salespeople categorize foreign customers based on cultural differences and similarities, and this aspect, according to the respondents, is considered as a key element for a salesperson who engages in cross-cultural interactions. The categorization process could serve as a cognitive framework for salespeople, allowing those with high CQ to choose the appropriate selling technique according to their counterpart's needs and habits.

Nonetheless, not all respondents proved to be high in all four dimensions of CQ: metacognitive CQ, in particular, was the only aspect common to all interviewees. Since literature suggests[16] that CQ might be developed through training, and since results proved that in none of the cases salespeople receive training in cultural issues, it could be important for sales organizations to consider CQ training to improve the cross-cultural sales performance of their salespeople.

Furthermore, although all participants in the study agreed about the importance of adaptive selling behavior, they do not always relate it to cultural dimensions. In fact, in one case, it is proposed that when negotiating, even with culturally diverse

15 S. ROMÁN & D. IACOBUCCI, *Antecedents and consequences of adaptive selling confidence and behavior: A dyadic analysis of salespeople and their customers*, "Journal of Academy of Marketing Science", vol. 38, no. 3, 2010, pp. 363-382.

16 D.S. BAKER & D. DELPECHITRE (2016).

counterparts, the thing that matters is the human relationship itself, which prescinds from cultural diversity. This finding suggests that adaptive selling behavior is not always related to high levels of cultural intelligence.

On the other hand, all salespeople that showed high levels of all four dimensions of cultural intelligence also displayed good levels of adaptive selling behavior. This result is consistent with Charoensukmongkol (2019)[17], whose findings confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between CQ and ASB.

As regards trait mindfulness, it was the most difficult dimension to assess. Despite that, it can be stated that sales managers who demonstrated higher levels of CQ and ASB, also recognized the importance of being mindful as a characteristic of the salesperson. In their statements, they highlighted the importance of being present and focused during the negotiation, in order to achieve better performances; this finding is consistent with Charoensukmongkol's hypothesis[18] which affirms that the positive relationship between CQ and ASB is positively moderated by trait mindfulness: that suggests that the positive relationship between CQ and ASB is stronger for salespeople with high levels of trait mindfulness.

[17] P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *The Efficacy of Cultural Intelligence for Adaptive Selling Behaviors in Cross-Cultural Selling: The Moderating Effect of Trait Mindfulness*, "Journal of Global Marketing", 2019, p. 6.

[18] *Ivi*, p. 8.

3.4.2. Limitations

There are research limitations that have to be considered. First, the results from this research were drawn from interviews conducted among a small sample of sales managers, who work in B2B firms based in Central Italy. Second, the selected firms work in different sectors: it would be interesting to analyze how different typologies of product and services might impact on the relevance of cultural intelligence and adaptive selling behavior in international sales performance. Moreover, generalizations about the results were difficult to make because of the small sample. To obtain more generalized support, it is advisable for future research to choose a larger sample from a variety of countries. Furthermore, despite the efforts to maintain a high level of objectivity in data collection, some of the answers might be biased since respondents were guided throughout the interview and sometimes examples were given by the interviewer in order to better explain the question. In particular, difficulties were found when asking participants about mindfulness. In fact, mindfulness is a little-known concept which would be better assessed by means of a quantitative scale, such as the one proposed by Brown and Ryan (2003)[18]. Future research can use in-depth interviews as a supplement to other methods of data collection, such as a questionnaire survey, in order to provide context to quantitative data and offer a more complete picture

[18] K.W. BROWN & R.M. RYAN (2003).

CONCLUSIONS

The present study aims to provide additional contributions to research in investigating the role of culture in international sales performance. The systematic review presented in Chapter 1, in fact, highlights the existence of a gap in literature regarding the effectiveness of cultural intelligence in real cross-cultural selling settings. Prior to the work of Charoensukmongkol (2019), literature lacked of a solid theory to explain why cultural intelligence (CQ) contributes to salespeople performance in cross-cultural selling situations[1] and was limited to exploring the role played by CQ on students in cross-cultural sales settings (Delpechitre and Baker, 2017; Becther and Swierczek, 2015)[2].

The qualitative research illustrated in this study – and developed on the basis of Charoensukmongkol's (2019) empirical model – attempts to deepen the knowledge regarding the implications of culture on international sales performance. In-depth interviews were conducted among sales managers, who work in Italian B2B firms

1 P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *The Efficacy of Cultural Intelligence for Adaptive Selling Behaviors in Cross-Cultural Selling: The Moderating Effect of Trait Mindfulness*, "Journal of Global Marketing", 2019, p. 12.

2 D. DELPECHITRE & D.S. BAKER, *Cross-Cultural Selling: Examining the Importance of Cultural Intelligence in Sales Education*, "Journal of Marketing Education", vol. 39, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-15.

C. BECHTER & F.W. SWIERCZEK *Digital sales negotiation stories*, "International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing", vol. 6, no. 3, 2015, p. 174.

operating in the international markets, with the purpose of exploring their perspective on the topics covered by the research, focusing on international sales performance, cultural intelligence, adaptive selling behavior and trait mindfulness. Given the nature of the data collection method, detailed information and examples were provided by the respondents. Recurring themes and opinions were then traced back to the core issues of the study and were subsequently analyzed. In accordance with the findings of Charoensukmongkol (2019), results presented a positive relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptive selling behavior. Furthermore, respondents who showed to be higher in CQ and ASB also agreed on the importance of mindfulness as a key personality trait for salespeople, suggesting that the positive relationship between cultural intelligence and adaptive selling behavior is stronger for salespeople with higher levels of trait mindfulness.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the research mainly focused on the qualitative aspects of the issues addressed, with consequent limitations, first of all, the generalizations of results. Despite the information and details provided by this research method, recommendations for future research is to use in-depth interviews as a supplement of quantitative surveys conducted among a larger sample of sales managers coming from different countries and sectors.

Notwithstanding the undeniable role played on international sales performance by external factors, such as organizational policy, technology and foreign market characteristics, it is clear that the role of culture, and in particular of cultural

intelligence, remains a fundamental area of interest that needs to be further investigated by future research.

APPENDIX A: SCALES[1]

Cultural intelligence (CQS)

NO.	ITEM
1	I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures.
2	I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages.
3	I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures.
4	I know the marriage systems of other cultures.
5	I know the arts and crafts of other cultures.
6	I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.
7	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with a different cultural background.
8	I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me.
9	I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interaction.

1 P. CHAROENSUKMONGKOL, *The Efficacy of Cultural Intelligence for Adaptive Selling Behaviors in Cross-Cultural Selling: The Moderating Effect of Trait Mindfulness*, "Journal of Global Marketing", 2019, p. 17.

10	I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a different culture.
11	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
12	I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is new to me.
13	I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.
14	I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.
15	I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture.
16	I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.
17	I use pauses and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.
18	I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.
19	I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.
20	I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

International sales performance

NO.	ITEM
1	I can find more prospective customers in the country I visited.
2	I can expand the sales territory in the country I visited.
3	I can achieve the target sales according to the assigned target sales of the organization.
4	I can effectively respond to the competitor brands in the visited country.
5	I can analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the products I am responsible to sell in the visited country.

Adaptive selling behaviors (ADAPTS)

NO.	ITEM
1	When I feel that my sales approach is not working, I can easily change to another approach.
2	I like to experiment with different sales approaches.
3	I am very flexible in the selling approach I use.
4	I can easily use a wide range of selling approaches.
5	I try to understand how one customer differs from another.

Trait mindfulness (MAAS)

NO.	ITEM
1	I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later.
2	I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.
3	I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
4	I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.
5	I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.
6	I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.
7	It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.
8	I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.
9	I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.
10	I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.

11	I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.
12	I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.
13	I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.
14	I find myself doing things without paying attention.
15	I snack without being aware that I'm eating.

Product knowledge

NO.	ITEM
1	Knowing the design and specifications of company products/services.
2	Knowing the applications and functions of company products/services.
3	Keeping abreast of company's production and technological developments.

	A	*B*	*C*	*D*
International sales performance	"L'innovazione tecnologica […] è estremamente importante in termini di materiali e soluzioni innovative. Prodotti che soprattutto siano eco-friendly quindi che impattino meno sull'ambiente, di cui in questi anni c'è un tamtam mediatico molto importante", "facciamo dei training abbastanza veloci […], i nostri venditori sono multi-prodotto, […] non sono estremamente tecnici"	"la riconoscibilità del brand in quel mercato è la prima chiave di accesso […], la bravura di crearsi connessioni in quel mercato, avere più connessioni possibili ti aiuta poi ad essere più efficace nella vendita finale", "è importantissima la conoscenza del mercato un po' a tutto tondo, […] in certi mercati la problematica è culturale"	"prima ancora di andare a vendere, cercare di conoscere un pochettino il mercato nel quale cerchi di andare ad interfacciarti, […] la cosa più importante è cercare di essere preparati quanto più possibile"	"trovare un partner giusto è la cosa più importante, […] creare un rapporto di collaborazione di lungo termine", "bisogna capire dove va il mercato, dove vanno le tendenze"

Table 8. Representative quotes. Source: own elaboration.

Metacogniti-ve CQ	"è assolutamente importante [conoscere la cultura del proprio interlocutore] soprattutto quando ci si trova a lavorare con clienti musulmani o di qualsiasi altra religione, con particolare attenzione nel rapporto, nel rispetto di quelle che sono le loro usanze, le loro esigenze e le loro tradizioni", "è importante conoscerlo [la cultura dell'interlocutore], far capire che si è sensibili a questa cosa",	"è importante […] capire chi hai davanti, da che paese viene, che cultura ha"	"È fondamentale la conoscenza", "se non hai una conoscenza, […] [è importante] fare qualche domanda in più", "se non conosci determinate situazioni, determinate culture, è fondamentale avere sempre tantissimo rispetto, in qualsiasi momento", "[aspetto fondamentale è] la preparazione, che nel costruire il rapporto fa fare la differenza", "quando prendi un contatto nuovo, sarebbe bene che tu arrivassi preparato"	"in Giappone, in Asia o in Medio Oriente […] ognuno ha le sue caratteristiche", "chi gestisce [i rapporti con l'estero] deve avere la sensibilità di capire i limiti e le caratteristiche delle diverse culture"

	"sai che devi fare attenzione a queste cose"			
Cognitive CQ	"Se il cliente [ndr. turco] viene in Italia e lo porto a cena fuori e gli offro del vino o della carne di maiale, non sono particolarmente attento alle sue esigenze e quindi lo faccio sentire a disagio"	"la Russia è un mercato molto particolare, dove i contratti hanno un valore minore rispetto a quello che hanno da noi, le relazioni sono differenti, molte persone, anche a livelli alti, non parlano inglese quindi ci sono tutte queste difficoltà. […] ogni mercato è parte a sé. Io guardo agli Emirati Arabi e ci sono delle dinamiche completamente	"la conoscenza dei mercati esteri è fondamentale […]. In Israele tu sai che praticamente il sabato e il venerdì loro non lavorano, lavorano la domenica. Quindi se tu chiami il venerdì con urgenza sai che naturalmente dai solo fastidio, perché magari sono in un momento di preghiera… quindi avere le conoscenze di quelle che sono le abitudini, almeno le abitudini basiche"	"Noi lavoriamo anche con il Giappone, che chiaramente ha una mentalità diversa dalla nostra, non facile da gestire […], [stare attenti alle differenze culturali e alle diverse modalità di contrattare] si impara con il tempo"

		diverse rispetto ai mercati europei", "in Italia, come anche in Germania, Francia e UK, c'è una specie di scaletta, di timeline che andiamo ad azionare quando portiamo avanti dei progetti. Vai negli Emirati Arabi ed è totalmente differente parti da altri punti, vai poi a sviscerare le cose in maniera diversa"		
Motivational CQ	"[caratteristica del venditore dovrebbe essere] la disponibilità ad ascoltare, a reagire e a dedicare del tempo"	"il venditore deve avere sempre un fuoco, una fiammella dentro che arde […] la motivazione è tutto, anche credere nel prodotto e avere	"devi cercare di conoscere quante più cose e avere proprio piacere di imparare perché naturalmente e soprattutto quando ti relazioni con	"il rapporto umano viene prima di tutto: se c'è un buon rapporto umano, la differenza di cultura si vede molto poco"

		voglia di analizzare il mercato culturale”	persone dell’altro mondo o comunque di culture o religioni differenti, la cosa bella è anche ascoltare”, “per fare il commerciale un aspetto molto importante è l’amore nel conoscere”, “se non sei positivo, non sei incoraggiato, parti già con il piede sbagliato […] positività e ottimismo sono i primi due aspetti perché l’impatto iniziale è fondamentale”	
Behavioral CQ	“in altri paesi, soprattutto in quelli musulmani, un	“altri paesi hanno altri modi di approcciarsi anche	“io faccio sempre riferimento a questo cliente israeliano,	“il rapporto con le persone non cambia molto”

	incontro che in Italia si gestisce in mezzora, può richiedere tre ore di star lì, chiacchierare, prendere un caffè… ha bisogno di tempi e ritmi completamente diversi"	solo con la gesticolazione. […] o con la discussione, anche questo vuole dire, […] noi italiani abbiamo un approccio molto caloroso, in altri paesi come gli Emirati Arabi o gli asiatici, hanno un approccio un po' più distaccato, ma anche i tedeschi"	[…] l'aspetto positivo che è piaciuto, è stato questo rispetto delle sue richieste, nei suoi tempi, e la disponibilità nell'essere pronto a rispondere anche la domenica"	
Adaptive selling behavior	"indipendentemente dal tipo di prodotto, […], si tratta sempre di rapporti umani tra un venditore e un acquirente […]. Qualsiasi attenzione, qualsiasi cura dei dettagli, del rapporto, della generazione dei	"un venditore deve avere più facce, capire chi ha davanti, analizzare un po' tutti gli elementi della discussione e in base a chi ha davanti modificare il suo approccio […] non	"è fondamentale cercare di far venir fuori quelle che sono le esigenze del cliente, quindi […] gli aspetti sui quali tu potresti andare a fare leva. Quindi fare qualche domanda aperta,	"bisogna capire chi si ha davanti e quali tasti toccare, […] capire quello che si può costruire con i partner perché sono progetti, rapporti di medio-lungo-lunghissima durata"

modi di porsi, sicuramente aiuta [a migliorare l'approccio nei confronti del cliente]"	puoi essere in tutte le situazioni, in tutte le relazioni di vendita la stessa persona. Devi adattarti, […] semplicemente adattarti al tuo interlocutore"	domande delle quali cerchi di prendere informazioni su com'è abituato a lavorare, quali sono poi naturalmente le sue regole…", "tu sei un sarto che fa abiti tutti i giorni, tu fai spedizioni tutti i giorni, però ogni singola spedizione è una spedizione a parte che ha un'asola un pochino più in su, o il colore di una cosa diversa, o il taglio differente… tu devi essere pronto a percepire quello che serve a lui, che gli dà una mano e coprire magari eventuali difetti, oppure che gli piace e che lo

			soddisfa quando si guarda allo specchio […], non dare per scontato che ognuno lo standardizzi, perché se poi lui [il cliente] avverte questo, sei morto a livello commerciale e vieni sostituito velocemente.”	
Mindfulness	“Si deve sapere per quale motivo si va a quell’incontro e si deve sempre avere ben presente l’obiettivo da raggiungere durante l’incontro ed alzarsi quando l’obiettivo è stato raggiunto; […] richiede una continua attenzione, […] sempre avere in	“devi fare tuo il momento. Soprattutto quando ci sono incontri importanti in cui ti stai giocando tutto non devi sbagliare, qui ed ora”	“di lavoro potresti anche parlare 5 minuti, anche un minuto, però essere lì, focalizzato su quello che è il suo lavoro, quello sarebbe fondamentale, ritornando proprio sul discorso dell’essere, avere come focus il	“generalmente è importante il momento della trattativa, ma capire anche cosa si fa domani, domani l’altro, oltre… lavorare giorno per giorno in funzione di quello che succederà poi in futuro”

mente chiaro quello che è l'obiettivo da portare a casa"	trasmettere al cliente che lui è la cosa più importante che ho", "concentrazione sul suo prodotto e sulla sua persona, quello è un valore aggiunto notevole"

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