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**The neglected role of cultural intelligence in recent immigrant  
newcomers' socialization**

**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in contributing to the socialization of recent immigrant newcomers (RINs). Drawing on relevant literatures, a conceptual model is developed highlighting the role of RINs' CQ in helping them choose the appropriate adjustment strategies which in turn allow them to better perform their job and to socially integrate into their workplace. The paper also examines the impact of the social context of the organization, namely the level of diversity, specifically focusing on how RINs may choose different adjustment strategies depending on the type of organizational context and according to the variance in their CQ. Thus, the paper makes three important contributions. First, the paper integrates CQ literature with immigrant and socialization literatures by exploring the *process* through which RINs' CQ can enhance their role performance and social integration during socialization. Second, at the individual level, RINs may find the analysis useful in comprehending the role of CQ for understanding cultural nuances and developing relationships with their new work colleagues, and this may motivate them to further develop their CQ. Third, organizations may consider providing RINs – as well as other employees – with cross-cultural training incorporating CQ modules to enhance and improve their CQ, and thereby optimize RINs' organizational socialization.

**Keywords**

Cultural intelligence, organizational socialization, diversity, onboarding, newcomer adjustment strategies, role performance, social integration

## **Introduction**

The growing trend of immigration has made it imperative for recent immigrant newcomers<sup>1</sup> (RINs) as well as for local born employees to develop their understanding of different cultures. The composition of immigrants in countries with higher immigration rates (i.e. Canada, the United States, Australia and Western Europe) has also changed over the past few years (Clarke and Skuterud, 2012; Stebleton and Eggerth, 2012; Tubergen and Sindradottir, 2011). Consequently, the workforce has become more diverse with employees of different race, ethnicity, and nationality working together and interacting on a continuous basis (Jonsen et al., 2011). With increased cross-cultural interaction, cultural misunderstanding is not unusual, and may hinder the smooth functioning of workplaces and the well-being of workers. Thus developing increased cultural understanding is imperative for the global workforce, and in particular for RINs, who are not only new to the country but also experience various challenges related to their integration into the new work culture. Such challenges include non-recognition of foreign education and work experience, discrimination during selection procedures, lower wages and earnings upon entering the

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<sup>1</sup> Consistent with Boyd and Thomas (2001), the present study defines RINs as first generation immigrants that recently acquired permanent residence status in a new country during a prime working stage of their life (aged 28 or more); have completed at least 16 years of schooling in their home country; and, based on their human capital, have started their first job in their host country.

workforce (Fang and Goldner, 2011), lack of local social networks (Hakak et al., 2010), as well as broader aspects of cultural adaptation such as change in identity and daily life circumstances (Berry, 1997; Yakushko, 2010).

Cultural misunderstandings are often caused by lack of awareness of cultural differences as well as inability to understand and adapt one's behavior. Research has shown that some individuals are very effective in managing cross-cultural relationships, highlighting that "something" is there which makes people more effective than others in a cross-cultural milieu (Caligiuri, 2000). Efforts to search for this "something" have resulted in the identification of *cultural intelligence* (CQ). CQ was introduced by Early and Ang in 2003, and later redefined by other scholars as "a system of interacting knowledge and skills, linked by cultural metacognition, that allows people to adapt to, select, and shape the cultural aspects of their environment" (Thomas et al., 2008: p. 127). More recently, Chen and colleagues (2011) contend that this kind of intelligence is an indication of "the capability to effectively adapt to new cultural contexts" (p. 246). Similar to expatriates with a higher CQ (Rose et al., 2010), RINs with a higher CQ are also expected to better understand and appreciate other cultures and behave appropriately and flexibly in cross-cultural settings.

In addition to overall cultural adaptation, RINs are also newcomers to organizations and thus must undergo socialization and adjustment processes at this level too. The socialization process of newcomers (locals) into organizations has been well examined (for reviews see Bauer and Erdogan, 2011; Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006). However, this process of adjustment for RINs has not been examined to the same extent (Raghuram et al., 2012). With many organizations facing talent shortages, skilled immigrants offer a new pool of talent that organizations can capitalize on to sustain their competitive positions (Yap et al., 2013). However, many developed countries are still struggling to successfully integrate immigrants into their workplaces (Stebleton and Eggerth, 2012; Zikic et al., 2010). We contend that CQ has a central place in understanding RINs' organizational socialization as well as their broader cultural adjustment (Gelfand et al., 2008).

In this vein, the present paper proposes a conceptual model and makes three important contributions. Firstly, the theoretical linkages proposed in this paper innovatively connect the CQ literature with immigrant and socialization literatures by exploring the *process* through which RINs' CQ can enhance their role performance and social integration as outcomes of socialization. More specifically, it examines the role of RINs' CQ in using various newcomer adjustment strategies which in turn also affect their role performance and social integration. The proposed relationships have the potential to stimulate greater

theoretical interest in this area, and also have practical implications for improving RINs' socialization processes. Secondly, at the individual level, RINs may find the analysis useful in comprehending the role of CQ for understanding cultural nuances and developing relationships with their new work colleagues, and this may motivate them to further develop their CQ. Thirdly, based on our model, organizations may consider providing RINs – as well as other employees – with cross-cultural training incorporating CQ modules. CQ is dynamic and can be learnt through cross-cultural interactions (Crowne, 2013; Thomas et al., 2008), thereby enhancing and improving employees' CQ is likely to optimize RINs' organizational socialization.

Although the conceptual model we present could be generalized to other areas of the global workforce, such as expatriates (Shaffer et al., 2012), it is specifically applicable to RINs. While effective cross-cultural interactions are important for expatriates, they usually receive cross-cultural training from their companies to avoid cultural misunderstandings and overcome challenges (Black and Mendenhall, 1990). Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) resonate more closely with RINs as they both instigate their own international career experiences and take the responsibility to overcome international work challenges; however their motivation to migrate differs (see Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010; Zikic et al., 2010). Even though SIEs are self motivated to pursue international careers, they are more likely to

immerse themselves in the host country culture and interact with host country nationals frequently; they also typically have better knowledge of the local language and may prepare well in advance for their career transition in the host country (Shaffer et al., 2012). Finally they may be more likely to be motivated to return home when they face adjustment difficulties (Al Ariss, 2010; Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). On the other hand, since qualified immigrants migrate to escape difficult political and economic situations in their home countries, and in search of better career and lifestyle opportunities (Zikic et al., 2010), they are typically highly motivated to overcome new barriers and challenges during these self-initiated international career transitions. Specifically, they manage these transitions by independently developing local know-how, and being extremely proactive in building new social and cultural capital, and keeping an eye on new career opportunities (Zikic et al., 2010). Therefore, when they successfully secure a job in the new country, it is imperative for them to continue to be proactive and take charge of their organizational socialization process instead of relying on their new organizations to make their career transition successful. To this end, it is important to study the role of CQ for RINs both directly in contributing to RINs achieving effective socialization, and via the mediating role of proactive newcomer adjustment strategies.



In order to study adjustment strategies, the present paper uses Cooper-Thomas et al.'s (2012) categories of newcomer adjustment strategies which include (i) change role or environment, (ii) learn or change self or seek information, and (iii) mutual development. Drawing from Bauer et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis, we focus on two proximal socialization outcomes of role performance and social integration. We define role performance as immigrant's understanding of their work tasks and demonstrating effective job performance (Bauer et al., 2007); and social integration as immigrant's adjustment to new workplace norms and values, and being socially accepted by others (Bauer et al., 2007). In the next section, we provide an overview of our proposed theoretical model. After that, we present a brief literature overview of CQ and its significance for RINs. Third, we provide a brief overview of newcomer adjustment strategies followed by relevant research propositions. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this research.

### **Theoretical development and conceptual model**

The main purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual model highlighting the role of CQ in the organizational socialization process of RINs. Organizational socialization is a process by which newcomers gain awareness and learn the pattern of behaviors expected of them by other members of the organization and, consequently, adjust to their new

workplace (Jokisaari and Nurmi, 2009). The key to this process is to acquire specific role and social knowledge, develop attitudes and adopt behaviors indispensable to successful functioning as a member of a specific organization (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

Learning across a number of domains is important, including the organization's values, norms, resource networks and politics, as well as how to perform the role and co-ordinate work with colleagues (Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006; Saks and Ashforth, 1997).

Simply put, the main purpose of organizational socialization is to turn outsiders into insiders so they become accepted members of the organization.

[Insert Figure 1.]

The above model proposes that CQ, an individual's ability that involves adaptation to, selection, and shaping the environment, plays a vital role in immigrants' social integration into the workplace and role performance. It is proposed that RINs with higher CQ use a greater variety of adjustment strategies than RINs with lower CQ. Moreover, the model takes account of the social context in terms of the existing level of diversity in the organization. It examines how diversity level and CQ of RINs interact together and impact the use of various adjustment strategies. More specifically, the model proposes that RINs with a higher CQ would use a greater variety of adjustment strategies, and that this effect would be more pronounced in organizational settings with greater diversity. That is, the

level of RINs' CQ has different implications for the use of adjustment strategies depending on the diversity of the organizational context.

### ***Cultural intelligence (CQ)***

In 2003, Early and Ang developed the construct of "CQ" and defined it as a person's capability to perform and manage effectively in an intercultural environment. Since then, researchers have defined CQ in different but related ways and initial research has been conceptual. For example, Early and Peterson (2004) defined CQ as an individual's capability to acquire, interpret, and behave on the basis of different cues to perform effectively in culturally diverse settings. Janssens and Brett (2006) presented a fusion model of team collaboration that focuses on CQ in global teams to produce creative solutions to global problems. Others (e.g. Triandis, 2006) proposed that CQ is a prerequisite to successful interaction across cultures, and that it can be developed through integration of information and multiple clues, and suspension of judgment until enough information is acquired to make a correct judgment.

More recently, Thomas et al. (2008: p. 127) presented a refined definition of CQ that emphasizes cultural metacognition, and both knowledge and skills that enable people to adapt to, select, and shape their cultural context. They contend that CQ is composed of three dimensions, namely cultural knowledge (understanding a body of information

regarding different cultures), cultural skills (knowing how to use that knowledge), and cultural metacognition (knowledge of and control over one's thinking and learning) (see Thomas et al., 2008, for further details).

Although metacognition has been used by previous researchers to define CQ, here cultural metacognition serves as a linking mechanism with the other two dimensions. Thus Thomas et al.'s (2008) definition of CQ as a system of interacting abilities that involves adaptation to, selection and shaping the environment presents a new conceptualization. Furthermore, effective intercultural interactions – that is good personal adjustment, development of good relationships with culturally different others, and completion of task-related goals – are the outcomes of CQ abilities. These latter two outcomes are consistent with the outcomes described in our model, that is, social integration and role performance; with personal adjustment potentially implicit in these. This supports the incorporation of Thomas et al.'s (2008) definition and model of CQ into our research.

There has been an increase in empirical studies of CQ over the past few years, showing a link between CQ and performance. For example, a study of Philippine laborers working in Taiwan demonstrated that CQ is a strong predictor of performance, with cultural shock partly mediating this relationship (Chen et al., 2011). Other studies have demonstrated the role of CQ as a key factor affecting social and performance outcomes including

international assignment effectiveness (Kim et al., 2008), team member acceptance (Flaherty, 2008), expatriate adjustment and performance (Shaffer and Miller, 2008; Rose et al., 2010), and leadership competencies (Groves and Feyerherm, 2011; Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

***The role of RINs' CQ.*** When immigrants move to their new host countries, cross-cultural interaction is inevitable. The immigrant literature shows that immigrants experience challenges in adapting to a new country (e.g., Syed, 2007; Zikic et al., 2010). In particular, many immigrants may experience difficult integration into the local labor market, workplace adjustment issues, and challenging cross-cultural interactions in general (Syed, 2007; Yakushko et al., 2008). However, despite these challenges the CQ literature so far has not been specifically applied and examined in the context of experiences of RINs in local organizations.

CQ helps an individual to better accommodate to a unique and culturally diverse setting and can be developed and improved through social interactions (Crowne, 2013; Thomas et al., 2008). CQ is beneficial for everyone who works in a diverse workforce; however it is likely to be particularly important for RINs. RINs bring with them different norms and experience from their home countries (Reitz, 2001) and are expected to adapt

and adjust to a new labor market and the work culture of the host country. Scholars acknowledge that immigrants differ greatly from each other with respect to characteristics such as human capital and other capabilities (Hum and Simpson, 2004). Thus it is likely that immigrants will also differ in their CQ, and therefore their ability to accommodate and adapt themselves in new settings.

For example, how would an immigrant from a collectivistic country with previous work experience in a collectivistic organizational culture cope and adjust to individualistic organizational culture typical of many companies in North America (Budhwar et al., 2008; Hofstede, 1980)? In such circumstances, it is expected that CQ would not only allow a recent immigrant to seek content knowledge (i.e., learn about the individualistic culture) but also allow him/her to gather process knowledge on how the individualistic culture affects employees' behavior (e.g., focus on personal achievement, reward for individual performance). Understanding these differences would then allow them to contrast what they may be accustomed to from their home countries and how to further adapt to the new setting. To illustrate, if RINs come from Japan, China or Singapore, countries high on collectivism (Hofstede, 1980), they would have been expected in these countries – as employees – to participate in group activities relating to social and performance outcomes, and to be rewarded for this (Lee et al., 2010; Mockaitis et al., 2012). This contrasts with

the more individualistic work cultures of Canada and the United States for example, where employees focus more on independent activities to demonstrate their performance and to obtain desired rewards (Mockaitis et al., 2012). For RINs higher in CQ, they would be able to understand and accept these cultural differences, and focus on activities that enable them to adapt and perform their jobs effectively and according to the rules and expectations of the new work culture of the host country.

Furthermore, employees in these high individual performance-oriented cultures, such as Canada and the United States, typically prefer to focus on their own work rather than produce work as a group (Early, 1993). In line with this, the social group is not as important referent in North America as it is in more collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980). Through their existing cultural skills, RINs would recognize these differences in behavior and local cultural expectations, and adjust their behavior to act according to these local norms. For example, in North America they would accept the lower value placed on socializing at work. Thus RINs might realize that socializing at work will not take place as they are used to, and appreciate the need to personally seek out social connections at appropriate opportunities. Empirical evidence exists that, for newcomers, the formation of informal social networks in the organization and social integration are positively related to each other (Morrison, 2002). Joardar (2011) argues that insiders are more willing to form

valuable relationships with culturally different newcomers who have high cultural intelligence. Therefore, when RINs with high CQ – through understanding of their own and others' cultures – adapt behaviors and devise actions appropriately, for example forming informal social networks in individual performance oriented cultures, it allows them to better integrate socially with others in the workplace.

The above mentioned initiatives of adapting to the norms and values of the new workplace would help RINs to be socially accepted by others (Hurst et al., 2012). As a result, CQ via cultural knowledge, cultural skills and cultural metacognition would allow RINs to adapt their behaviors to suit the setting, for example being focused on appropriate types of performance and achievement, and forming social networks. This would result in better role performance and social integration. Thus we propose that:

Proposition 1: The CQ of RINs is positively related to a) role performance and b) social integration.

### ***CQ and newcomer adjustment strategies***

Previous studies have focused on various proactive actions that newcomers take to facilitate their process of socialization (Cooper-Thomas and Burke, 2012). Evidence exists that newcomers use strategies such as monitoring, information seeking (Miller and Jablin, 1991;



Morrison 1993), feedback seeking (Ashford, 1986), networking, job change negotiation (Gruman et al., 2006), and relationship building (Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Based on interviews with eighty-six experienced newcomers, Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) grouped these various strategies into three broad categories of (i) change role or environment, (ii) learn or change self or seek information, and (iii) mutual development.

Strategies that falls under the ‘change role or environment’ category are self-determined and include behaviors such as minimizing (doing work that closely matches ones’ skills and experience to facilitate performance), proving (working hard to demonstrate abilities), giving (providing information or advice to co-workers), and role modeling (copying others’ behaviors and ways of working) (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012). Strategies in the ‘mutual development’ category focus on the inclusion of newcomers’ colleagues and others in the socialization process, and include strategies such as befriending (being open and friendly towards colleagues), teaming (being visibly involved as a team member), exchanging (trading resources such as industry contacts, expertise, or experience with other colleagues), flattering (behaving in ways that others feel good about themselves), negotiating (discussing role expectations), talking (participating in informal conversations), socializing (arranging or attending social events outside of work), and networking (establishing contacts with key people). The ‘learn or change self or seek

information' category includes various opportunistic strategies in which newcomers rely on co-workers and other organizational resources to provide learning opportunities. These strategies include doing (learning by doing/experimenting), gathering (observing and reflecting to work out requirements), following (being guided by others' expectations), waiting (relaxed, unhurried and being open to feedback), attending (training and induction events), asking (direct questioning to find out information), and reading (reviewing relevant documents to gain information). Cooper-Thomas et al.'s (2012) study demonstrated that newcomers use these strategies not only to acquire but also to provide information to others in the organization to achieve their adjustment goals. Moreover, Cooper-Thomas and colleagues argued that experienced newcomers need to socialize themselves through their use of adjustment strategies rather than relying on the organization, which is unlikely to develop structured programs for unique roles. Furthermore, they also argued that experienced newcomers are more likely to use proactive strategies that shape the environment to suit them (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012).

There are analogies between experienced newcomers and RINs. When working in a new cross-cultural environment, RINs must know what is expected from them in their new roles and how to execute those roles to meet expectations (Friesen, 2011). In order to achieve these adjustment goals, RINs who have a higher CQ will be motivated to both

adapt to, and also shape, their environment (Thomas et al., 2008), and are likely to use a variety of strategies to this end. Looking at each category in turn, RINs with high CQ would use strategies in the *change role or environment category* (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2011), reducing the amount of learning required and using their existing skills to demonstrate superior job performance. Strategies in this category include gaining credibility, changing work procedures, and working longer hours. RINs with a higher CQ shape their environment (Thomas et al., 2008). This is exemplified by the case of a highly skilled immigrant from Pakistan to Canada who gave suggestions to his Canadian manager to improve work processes and thereby was allowed by his manager to do his job in his own way (reference blinded for review). Thus, the adaptive skills provided by CQ could help RINs to generate new behaviors that are acceptable and optimal in cross-cultural interactions.

Turning to the *mutual development category*, strategies include building relationships with colleagues, networking, talking, general socializing, and negotiating one's work role (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012). The ultimate goal of any newcomer is to successfully integrate with others in the organization and demonstrate good performance (Hurst et al., 2012). With these goals in mind, culturally intelligent RINs would know or find out what is required of them in the successful completion of these goals through interaction with

knowledgeable insiders. Strategies for adjustment that gain information from insiders are likely to reveal locally appropriate ways of behaving (Cooper-Thomas and Wilson, 2011). In line with this, Early et al. (2006) contend that when individuals are able to recognize and reconcile cultural differences through CQ, they are likely to be effective employees in the new country. Following similar reasoning, it can be argued that RINs with higher CQ can more easily adapt and adjust their thinking and behaviors to fit with local norms and routines of the new organization.

Furthermore, as CQ provides perceptual skills such as open mindedness, this would allow RINs to recognize the existence of other cultures and encourage them to be non-judgmental (Thomas et al., 2008). While interacting with others, for example to discuss role expectations, RINs with high CQ could use their cultural knowledge and adaptive skills such as self regulation to gauge the reaction of others and determine if they are behaving appropriately (Harrison et al., 1996) which may then lead to developing good relationships with peers and supervisors. Scholars agree that through networking and building relationships with people from diverse backgrounds, an individual may gain more job related resources (Ryan et al., 2008). RINs' cultural knowledge and skills may allow them to establish contacts with key people in their organization. In addition to formal job-related social interactions, such skills and cultural knowledge would also enable them to

socialize with others informally. Thus RINs with higher CQ are more likely to use adjustment strategies such as talking to others, networking, informal socializing, and even role negotiation. In the above mentioned case of the skilled immigrant from Pakistan, this individual noted that his motivation to work hard and over long hours to achieve his goals helped him to build good mutual relationships with his peers and supervisor (reference blinded for review). The author argued that the immigrant's higher CQ might have helped him in building good mutual relationship with peers and supervisors both directly through interactions, and in doing the background work that gave colleagues a more favorable impression of his performance so that they would be inclined to interact (Chen and Klimoski, 2003).

It is widely recognized that it is not possible to know each and every thing about all cultures, therefore the cultural metacognition element of CQ would have compensatory effects for RINs' disadvantages in specific cultural knowledge and skills (cf. Thomas et al., 2008). For example, a RIN interacting with a new other-culture colleague might have limited cultural knowledge about his/her new peer, but his high cultural metacognition would make this RIN sensitive to this and cause him/her to attend more deeply to the cultural context and not to behave automatically. For example, in a cross-cultural encounter involving debate, imagine the end result is the withdrawal of the other-culture

participant from the discussion. This event results in gains in the RIN's CQ domain knowledge and skills. Based on this experience, if a debate was likely to recur in a similar situation with an other-culture participant, the RIN – due to enhanced metacognition that allows him/her to reflect upon previous experience – would behave differently, perhaps not entering the debate or making his/her arguments in different ways (Thomas et al., 2008).

Finally, in the *learn or change self or seek information category*, strategies include information seeking, feedback seeking, asking questions, observing others, and reading (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012). These strategies rely heavily on organizational insiders to help the new employee adjust. An earlier study on Filipino immigrants to Canada reveals that support from Canadian born co-workers and other immigrants was positively associated with immigrants' workplace adjustment (Wang and Sangalang, 2005). The socialization literature suggests that newcomers cannot get all the information they need unless they themselves participate in this process (Hurst et al., 2012; Morrison, 2002). However, Hurst et al. (2012) argue that proactive socialization is less likely to occur and is less effective when newcomers differ from existing group members.

It is argued that CQ would help RINs to be more proactive and to ask various questions about their new role. A recent study on engineer immigrants' workplace integration in Canada shows that immigrants were initially unclear about role expectations and were also

uncertain about which type of question to ask (Friesen, 2011). In such novel situations, cultural skills such as open mindedness and awareness of the existence of other cultures (Thomas et al., 2008), would allow RINs to realize that their “normal” ways of doing thing might be “abnormal” in the new organization. Based on this, RINs with high CQ would be more likely to observe or ask questions, and then use this information to adapt themselves to the new environment (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012). This suggests that RINs are open to learn and change but, depending on their CQ, may find it more or less hard to identify what learning or change is needed.

Based on the above discussion, it is proposed that culturally intelligent RINs’ recognition of cultural differences, greater understanding of behaviour and ability to interpret it would allow them to reflect upon a greater variety of adjustment strategies, and then chose a range of strategies which are appropriate and acceptable in a given context. Following this discussion, we put forth the following proposition:

Proposition 2: The CQ of RINs is positively associated with using a greater variety of adjustment strategies.

***Level of diversity, newcomer adjustment strategies and the moderating role of CQ***

Research on how the level of diversity in an organization impacts the socialization process for newcomers has been sparse (Hurst et al., 2012). In this section, we examine how diversity level and CQ of RINs interact together and impact the use of various adjustment strategies for RINs. CQ emphasizes those capabilities that help individuals to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ang et al., 2011). Many studies have demonstrated the impact of organizational diversity on organizational outcomes such as organizational performance, innovation, employee turnover, and work group effectiveness. Some studies have found positive effects of diversity (McLoed et al., 1996; Watson et al., 1993) while others studies have found either negative (Jackson and Joshi, 2004; Kirkman et al., 2004) or non-significant findings (Jehn and Bezrukova, 2004).

Diverse employees bring different views and perspectives to solve problems and complete tasks (McMillan-Capehart, 2005). Based on a review, Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) presented two forms of diversity: (i) social category diversity (“social”) and (ii) informational/functional diversity (“functional”). Social diversity refers to obvious differences among individuals such as sex, age, ethnicity, and national origin; whereas functional diversity refers to less obvious differences among individuals and includes more job-related characteristics such as functional and educational background. Functional diversity has been found to be positively related to group performance (Chatman et al.,



1998; De Dreu and West, 2001); whereas social category diversity is found to be negatively related to group cohesion (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

The globalization of business and increase of immigrants in the workforce has led to greater social and functional diversity. People of different cultures, race and ethnicity are working together. Some organizations choose to structure their diverse workforce in ways that get most benefit from this varied knowledge and expertise (Cummings, 2004). For example, some banks in New Zealand promote themselves in having social diversity across their customer service roles, to match customer needs such as language and cultural understanding (ANZ, 2013; BNZ, 2013). We propose that both social and functional diversity will influence newcomers to use a broader range of adjustment strategies. This is because strategies may be more or less appropriate according to the colleague, role or context. Taking the banking example just introduced, in call centers general socializing and seeking feedback may be commonly done and appropriate whereas in corporate banking there may be greater formality. Thus functional diversity may promote the use of different newcomer adjustment strategies. Similarly a local colleague may be happy to take questions (a strategy of direct inquiry) whereas an other-culture colleague may prefer questions to be asked of supervisors only. Thus social diversity may result in the use of different newcomer adjustment strategies.

For newcomers, developing an identity as an organizational member is an important part of organizational socialization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), and is facilitated when organizational members provide social validation to the newcomer (Smith et al., 2012). However, newcomers usually face difficulties in forming their own social identities when existing organizational members have different social and cultural characteristics (Hurst et al., 2012). Similarly, RINs working in a diverse environment need not only to manage different expectations from others but also exclusionary activities (cf. Hurst et al., 2012). Consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), social category diversity (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004) asserts that individuals categorize themselves and others on the basis of existing similarities and differences. In this way, they categorize others as belonging either to their own in-group or to one or more out-groups (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Lee et al., 2010). There is also a tendency for people to favor, trust or like members of their in-group as compared to members of out-groups (Turner et al., 1987). Additionally, social identity theory asserts that members of a lower status group are more willing to identify themselves with the members of a higher status group, that is they would like to form the social identity that includes the members of higher status groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

Research has shown that immigrants are usually considered as members of lower status groups as compared to other employees (Al Ariss, 2010; Shinnar, 2007; Wang and Sangalang, 2005). Hence, RINs must rely on different adjustment strategies so that they become an accepted member of the organization. The use of strategies such as informal socializing, talking, befriending and flattering would allow them to affiliate with others, especially when social diversity exists in the organization. Similarly, functional diversity may also facilitate the use of adjustment strategies. Since different functions and job categories have varied prestige and status (for example, an HR managerial position is more prestigious than an administrative officer), this would encourage different kinds of strategies, such as being more deferential when there is a high status difference (e.g., flattery), and more convivial when there is a low status difference (e.g., talking, socializing, and befriending). Therefore, both social diversity and functional diversity require and facilitate the use of diverse adjustment strategies by RINs. Following this discussion, we propose that:

Proposition 3: Level of organizational diversity (social and functional) is positively associated with using a greater variety of RINs' newcomer adjustment strategies.

Research has demonstrated that a higher CQ allows people to develop trust with others from a different background and to desist from exclusionary activities (Rockstuhl and Ng, 2008). Previous studies on leadership performance also demonstrate that CQ plays a vital role in assessing the dynamics of diverse work settings and devising appropriate behaviors (Groves and Feyerherm, 2011; Livermore, 2010). Based on CQ theory and empirical evidence, it can be inferred that RINs with a higher CQ are in a better position to understand the dynamics of a culturally diverse workplace. They have the ability to avoid miscommunication and misunderstandings by drawing on their cognitive and metacognitive resources (Thomas et al., 2008) and choosing appropriate adjustment strategies. Even if they do encounter cultural miscommunications, they would consider these as learning experiences rather than something to be embarrassed about (Blasco et al., 2012). Thus, CQ would allow RINs to build superior qualities for judging diverse work settings and adapting their behaviors and actions accordingly.

Now let us consider how CQ would help RINs in choosing various newcomer adjustment strategies. When social diversity exists in the organization, RINs with a higher CQ would more likely to use strategies that fall under *change role or environment* category and *mutual development* category. Social identity theory stresses that members of higher socioeconomic groups are reluctant to help members of lower status group to form

identities that include their higher status group, and hence may avoid interaction and communication (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). This implies that native born employees would be reluctant to interact with RINs due to various stereotypes such as immigrants holding a lower status. In this case, RINs with high CQ would try to be friendly and helpful towards their colleagues through knowledge sharing (strategies of befriending and providing information); and try to create a positive impression and sometimes may ask questions and acknowledge their colleagues' viewpoints to make them feel good about themselves (strategies of teaming and flattering). These strategies would be aimed at making their colleagues more positively inclined to the RINs (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012).

On the other hand, where functional diversity (i.e., differences in information, expertise, knowledge, viewpoints) exists in the workplace, RINs with a higher CQ would tend to use adjustment strategies that fall under *learn or change self or seek information* category along with *mutual development* category (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012). Research suggests that sometimes newcomers tend to avoid asking questions due to the fear of disclosing their ignorance to others (Hurst et al., 2012). However, performance-oriented cultures encourage curiosity from their employees. Recognizing these differences in work and cultural values, RINs with a higher CQ in these cultures would try to seek information from others who have role expertise (a strategy of asking) and may observe others to find

out work requirements (strategies of observing/gathering). They may undertake more training and participate in more induction events to expand their own knowledge and enhance their own expertise (a strategy of attending) (reference blinded for review). Thus a higher CQ would allow RINs to better choose appropriate adjustment strategies according to the diversity of the work context. Hence, we propose the following:

Proposition 4: The CQ of RINs will positively moderate the relationship between the level of diversity (social and functional) and the use of adjustment strategies such that higher CQ will strengthen the relationship between the level of organizational diversity and the use of a greater variety of adjustment strategies.

### ***Adjustment strategies, role performance and social integration***

Drawing on the three broad categories of newcomer adjustment strategies (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012), for the category of *change role or environment*, RINs are qualified professionals who have a quantity and quality of work experience from their home countries sufficient to meet stringent immigration standards (Friesen, 2011; reference blinded for review). Assuming they are doing jobs commensurate with their knowledge and skills (or even if they feel they are underutilized), they can share their knowledge and provide information about various tasks to their colleagues (Friesen, 2011). This would

give them the opportunity to create a positive impression about themselves, thus helping in their social integration into the work place since insiders are more accepting of capable newcomers (Chen and Klimoski, 2003). Additionally, by doing work that closely matches their skill set and by working hard, they would be able to demonstrate superior performance in their current jobs.

The second category presented by Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) is related to *information seeking and sense-making* to facilitate personal understanding and adjustment. Newcomers engage in information and feedback seeking to reduce uncertainty and create awareness about what is expected from them (Kim et al., 2005; Saks and Ashforth, 1997). Uncertainty reduction theory explicates the ways to reduce uncertainty in relation to variables such as similarity, attraction, and amount of communication (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). Based on the arguments of uncertainty reduction theory, it is likely that RINs having a higher CQ would engage in information seeking behaviors in their new workplaces to create predictable environments (Falcione and Wilson, 1988). Acquiring information should facilitate adjustment on both social factors that support integration, as well as role factors that support performance. A classic case of acquiring appropriate behaviors (normative information) is revealed in a recent qualitative study on immigrant engineers' integration into Canadian workplaces (Friesen, 2011). One RIN, with

apparently high CQ, observed that sharing in humor would help him to become a part of the workgroup. So he laughed along with colleagues at various stories being told during communal lunch periods, even though he did not totally understand the stories (Friesen, 2011). Thus adopting acceptable patterns of social interactions by RINs can facilitate their social integration into the workplace.

The third category presented by Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) is of *mutual development*. A recent study examining the relationship between immigrant sex and stress level at the workplace with the moderating role of supervisor support suggests the need for supervisor support including effective mentoring for new immigrants (both males and females) (Raghuram et al., 2012). Wang and Sangalang's (2005) study provides evidence that support from other similar group immigrants and native born colleagues is helpful for successful workplace integration of RINs. Research has shown that informal relationships with co-workers, supervisors and mentors are also an important means of successful socialization (Ashford and Black, 1996; Cooper-Thomas, 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). These informal relationships are a source of social support, guidance, advice, and information (Major et al., 1995) that would help RINs to perform their tasks effectively and become socially integrated. Since informal relationships can provide information, advice, and support, RINs who have a higher CQ would be more likely to seek out interaction



opportunities (cf. Kim et al., 2005) to build their cultural knowledge and skills. After initial interactions, which are likely to proceed more smoothly for high CQ RINs, they may also be more sought out by colleagues for interaction (Chen and Klimoski, 2003). Thus by behaving proactively, and having this reciprocated, high CQ RINs may initiate *mutual adjustment* behaviors such as general socializing, networking, and building relationships with the boss (Cooper-Thomas and Burke, 2012). These behaviors increase the likelihood of RINs' social acceptance by organizational insiders and also provide the opportunity to gain information about work, leading to improved role performance. Following this, we propose that:

Proposition 5a: The use of newcomer adjustment strategies by RINs will be positively associated with a) role performance and b) social integration.

The above discussion highlights, first, the significance of CQ for RINs in choosing various adjustment strategies and, in turn, the role of adjustment strategies in facilitating RINs to become socially integrated into their workplace and perform their roles effectively in socially and functionally diverse organizational contexts. Logically, this places newcomer adjustment strategies as a mediator of the relationship of CQ with role

performance and social integration. Following this, we propose two mediating relationships.

Proposition 6: Newcomer adjustment strategies will mediate the relationship of CQ with a) role performance and b) social integration.

### **Discussion and directions for future research**

This paper contributes to the CQ, immigrant and socialization literatures. While the significance of CQ for expatriates and leaders has been well examined, the role of CQ in RINs' socialization and integration into the local workplace remains under-explored. Thus by focusing on RINs in particular, as an important labor group in many economies today (Kogan, 2006), this paper extends the CQ literature by elucidating the specific role of CQ for RINs' successful organizational socialization, performance and integration into the new work setting. The proposed relationships highlight CQ as an important factor in facilitating RINs' organizational socialization process. We also proposed that CQ is a key element in choosing various adjustment strategies in diverse organizational settings, again enhancing RINs' overall adjustment and success in the new local organization.

Secondly, the immigrant literature highlights that a successful integration of immigrants in the workforce remains a challenge for many immigrants and organizations

(Stebbleton and Eggerth, 2012). Scholars contend that current problems for RINs should be identified and addressed such that RINs may be successfully integrated into the workforce, to thereby gain the benefits of diversity and overcome talent shortages that many organizations face today, as well as have positive impact on local economies (Jian, 2012; Rietz, 2001; Yap et al., 2013). To this end, the paper explores and explains the process through which RINs could be successfully integrated into the organizations to overcome adjustment challenges, thus contributing to the immigrant literature.

Furthermore, the paper also contributes to the socialization literature and examines the mediating role of newcomer adjustment strategies between the CQ of RINs and social integration and role performance. Literature in this field shows that newcomer adjustment strategies aid socialization into the organization, and also that experienced newcomers use more proactive adjustment strategies (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012). However, the socialization literature has rarely examined the role of diversity or newcomer misfit, although these issues have just recently begun to be explored (Cooper-Thomas and Wright, 2013; Hurst et al., 2012; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2011). Nonetheless, what leads to the selection and adoption of various adjustment strategies for these experienced newcomers has not been well examined.

Therefore, the present paper contributes to these various literatures. Our model explains the process through which RINs can be successfully integrated into the workforce. Although RINs struggle to integrate with others upon joining an organization (Jian, 2012), social and functional diversity, newcomer adjustment strategies and, most centrally, CQ, can facilitate socialization. However, the model also shows that the socialization process of RINs is not simple; rather it is complex and requires more detailed consideration of individual and contextual factors. CQ is at the centre of our model, and is especially key in facilitating successful role performance and social integration.

Empirical research should be conducted to test the given propositions. Given the scope of our model, we suggest a narrower focus on RIN's CQ as a fundamental variable to build from. We recommend first examining a limited subset of newcomer adjustment strategies to understand their effects (e.g., blinded for review) as mediators of the CQ to role performance and social integration relationships.

### ***Practical Implications***

The present study also has several practical implications for organizations. The proposed model sheds light on the critical role of CQ as a competency that facilitates RINs' socialization outcomes in the diverse work milieu. It is suggested that CQ would allow RINs to better understand the cultural nuances and behaviors that are attuned to a diverse

workforce. Uncertainty is a hallmark of being an organizational newcomer (Saks and Ashforth, 1997), and for RINs, the cross-cultural aspects of adjustment add to this uncertainty. RINs with high CQ can better manage their emotions through self awareness, self regulation, and self empathy, supporting more successful use of diverse adjustment strategies via effective cross-cultural interactions (cf. Ozcelik and Paprika, 2010). Our model suggests that RINs with higher CQ could actually perform better, and create better networks in organizations through the use of appropriate adjustment strategies that would help them to be more productive and successful as organizational members, and alleviate the common immigrant challenges to integration such as cultural misunderstandings, workplace adjustment issues, and lack of social networks (e.g., Fang and Goldner, 2011; Hakak, et al., 2010; Stebleton and Eggerth, 2012; Yakushko, 2010). Therefore, in order to promote the application of CQ, organizations need to foster an environment where RINs and other employees are encouraged to view situations with open mindedness and ready to see the same issue with multiple perspectives.

Organizations often use personality and job knowledge assessments for the selection of employees (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Fallaw and Kantrowitz, 2011; Robertson and Smith, 2001); however these factors may not account for effective job performance and social integration of employees working outside their home countries. Therefore, a CQ self

assessment tool (Ang et al., 2007) could be included in the hiring process and used to assess the current level of CQ for RINs. If this assessment shows a low level of CQ, then these RINs, upon joining, should be provided with additional cross-cultural training and development programs. Specifically, organizations could include different modules of CQ in cross-cultural training to enhance RINs and existing employees' cultural knowledge, improve their cultural skills and focus on behavioral changes that show respect towards others (Thomas et al., 2008). To illustrate, Early and Peterson (2004) presented training interventions for enhancing metacognitive, cognitive and behavioral CQ, such as the use of cognitive structure analysis for improving cognitive and metacognitive CQ, and dramaturgical exercises such as role plays, behavioral modification, and visual arts for enhancing behavioral CQ. Although the responsibility for career development lies with RINs since they self-initiated international career transitions, organizations hiring them may also choose to take responsibility and contribute to their development.

To conclude, the aim of this paper is to offer a theoretical model for understanding the implications of CQ for RINs' integration into their workplaces. The model proposed that the level of diversity and the level of CQ of immigrants interact to influence the use of adjustment strategies, with both also having direct effects. The proposed conceptual model also presented the mediating role of newcomers' adjustment strategies in the relationship

between CQ and both role performance and social integration. Further research on RINs, testing and extending the current model, is important to benefit both the countries and organizations hiring RINs, and also RINs themselves to enable them to be effective and integrated employees.

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