

# Does Cultural Intelligence Increase Professional Success among Immigrant Workers? A Quebec-Based Study

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Résumé de l'article

Malgré des politiques publiques visant à favoriser l'intégration socioprofessionnelle des personnes immigrantes (PIs), leur situation reste précaire à l'échelle mondiale. De plus en plus de recherches suggèrent que la mobilisation des compétences culturelles des PIs pourrait faciliter leur intégration. Notre étude met cette hypothèse à l'épreuve en explorant, dans le contexte québécois, la relation entre le quotient culturel (QC) des PIs et leur succès professionnel, évalué à deux niveaux : un niveau intermédiaire, la socialisation organisationnelle (SO), et un niveau ultime, le succès objectif de carrière (SOC), mesuré par la rémunération et le classement hiérarchique.

Un échantillon raisonné de 103 PIs a répondu à un questionnaire en ligne en 2020. Des tests de régression linéaire et de comparaison de moyennes ont été réalisés pour vérifier nos hypothèses. Les résultats montrent que les PIs ayant les scores les plus élevés en quotient culturel (QC) réussissent mieux leur socialisation organisationnelle (SO, succès intermédiaire), mais ni le QC ni la SO ne sont corrélés au succès objectif de carrière (SOC), sauf pour les PIs provenant des pays du Nord global. Si le succès intermédiaire semble lié à la capacité des PI à intégrer la culture de leur organisation hôte, le SOC paraît davantage influencé par des facteurs structurels d'intégration, surtout pour les PIs des pays du Sud.

À la lumière de la littérature en relations industrielles, ces résultats ont été discutés en profondeur. L'indépendance statistique entre le QC et le SOC, ainsi qu'entre la SO et le SOC, remet en question l'hypothèse des capacités individuelles et suggère la nécessité de la combiner avec les déterminants structurels pour une intégration réussie. Cette étude apporte une contribution originale, d'une part, en opérationnalisant l'intégration socioprofessionnelle dans un modèle de succès professionnel et, d'autre part, en relevant l'impact limité des compétences culturelles individuelles face aux contraintes structurelles.

# Does Cultural Intelligence Increase Professional Success among Immigrant Workers? A Quebec-Based Study

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## Abstract

We investigated the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) among immigrant workers (IWs) in their professional success within Quebec organizations. Professional success was assessed at two stages of a worker's career: an intermediate (organizational socialization: OS) and an ultimate stage (objective career success: OCS). Data from a purposive sample of 103 IWs show that CQ predicts OS, but neither CQ nor OS predicts OCS, except for IWs from Global North countries. Thus, intermediate success depends on the immigrant's personal ability to integrate into the organization's culture, but this ability will increase objective career success only if the immigrant is from the Global North, and not from the Global South. These findings challenge the hypothesis that socio-economic integration depends on the immigrant's personal ability to adapt. Finally, we discuss structural factors that may affect the CQ/OCS relationship.

**Keywords:** Cultural competencies; socio-professional integration; career success; immigrant

## Résumé

Malgré des politiques publiques visant à favoriser l'intégration socioprofessionnelle des personnes immigrantes (PIs), leur situation reste précaire à l'échelle mondiale. De plus en plus de recherches suggèrent que la mobilisation des compétences culturelles des PIs pourrait faciliter leur intégration. Notre étude met cette hypothèse à l'épreuve en explorant, dans le contexte québécois, la relation entre le quotient culturel (QC) des PIs et leur succès professionnel, évalué à deux niveaux : un niveau intermédiaire, la socialisation organisationnelle (SO), et un niveau ultime, le succès objectif de carrière (SOC), mesuré par la rémunération et le classement hiérarchique.

Un échantillon raisonné de 103 PIs a répondu à un questionnaire en ligne en 2020. Des tests de régression linéaire et de comparaison de moyennes ont été réalisés pour vérifier nos hypothèses. Les résultats montrent que les PIs ayant les scores les plus élevés en quotient culturel (QC) réussissent mieux leur socialisation organisationnelle (SO, succès intermédiaire), mais ni le QC ni la SO ne sont corrélés au succès objectif de carrière (SOC), sauf pour les PIs provenant des pays du Nord global. Si le succès intermédiaire semble lié à la capacité des PI à intégrer la culture de leur organisation hôte, le SOC paraît davantage influencé par des facteurs structurels d'intégration, surtout pour les PIs des pays du Sud.

À la lumière de la littérature en relations industrielles, ces résultats ont été discutés en profondeur. L'indépendance statistique entre le QC et le SOC, ainsi qu'entre la SO et le SOC, remet en question l'hypothèse des capacités individuelles et suggère la nécessité de la combiner avec les déterminants structurels pour une intégration réussie. Cette étude apporte une contribution originale, d'une part, en opérationnalisant l'intégration socioprofessionnelle dans un modèle de succès professionnel et, d'autre part, en relevant l'impact limité des compétences culturelles individuelles face aux contraintes structurelles.

**Mots-clés:** Compétences culturelles; intégration socioprofessionnelle; succès de carrière; immigrants

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# 1. Introduction

Although immigration is a key demographic, cultural and economic pillar of Quebec, many immigrants still struggle to fully integrate into the province's labour market. Their challenges include difficulties in building strong work relationships (Agbon, 2020), in seizing opportunities for career advancement and in accessing positions of power (Frank & Hou, 2017; Lefebvre, 2009; Malambwe, 2017; Gauthier, 2016). Without access to quality jobs that match their qualifications, immigrants cannot fully participate in Quebec's economic and social life. It is therefore important to identify the root causes—admittedly a tough task, as a consensus scarcely exists in the literature.

There are two major models of immigrant integration: one structural, the other individual. The structural model, arguably the more common one in the industrial relations literature, focuses on systemic barriers to professional success, such as non-recognition of foreign credentials by Quebec's professional bodies (Dioh & Racine, 2017), anti-immigrant discrimination (Dostie & Javdani, 2020) and negative employer perceptions of inclusive policies (Beaudry et al., 2019). The individual model, derived from what might be termed “transactional human resource management” (HRM), presents integration as a personal effort to meet organizational success criteria, particularly through cultural adjustment (Jyoti & Kour, 2015; Velez-Calle et al., 2018). For example, Ertorer et al. (2022) argue that the human and cultural capital of immigrants drives their integration into the workforce (see also Yap et al., 2010). Communication and cultural skills have been particularly identified as key to success (Lai et al., 2017).

Though seemingly complementary, these models clash on one critical question: who is responsible for successful integration? The structural model appears to assign responsibility to institutional support systems, on the assumption that immigrants have limited resources. In contrast, the individual model, based on a liberal employment model, arguably suggests that success depends on the immigrant's personal ability to adapt. Unfortunately, the individual model has rarely been tested statistically, except in studies of expatriates (Jyoti & Kour, 2017; Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Ramalu & Subramaniam, 2019). However, expatriates, being predominantly White and privileged (Brewster et al., 2017), face fewer socioeconomic barriers than do immigrants. In our study, we seek to test the individual model by assessing the effects of cultural competencies on immigrant professional success. Quebec offers an interesting setting for such a study, given its growing immigrant population and integration infrastructure.

We specifically address whether cultural intelligence, a key construct of cultural competency (Alon et al., 2016; Ang et al., 2007; Velez-Calle et al., 2018), influences how well immigrants succeed in Quebec organizations. We draw on the literature to propose two stages of success: an “intermediate” stage, defined by gains in organizational socialization, and an “ultimate” stage, defined by gains in compensation and hierarchical ranking (objective career success). We find that cultural intelligence predicts intermediate success but not objective career success, except for immigrants from the Global North. After discussing these findings in relation to the industrial relations and cross-cultural management literatures, we propose a hybrid model of immigrant professional success, which recognizes the role of cultural competencies while accounting for the enduring effects of structural constraints. Finally, we use an instrumental statistical method with a view to fostering broader discussion, rather than seeking to generalize from our findings.

## 2. An Overview of Quebec Immigrants

According to the International Organization for Migration, an immigrant is any person who moves from their current place of residence to one in another country, which then becomes their new primary place of residence (Paquet, 2022). Immigrants account for 15% of Quebec's population. In 2023, 68.5% of admissions for permanent residence fell into the category of economic immigrants, i.e., those who were selected for their ability to contribute to the province's economic goals (Institut de Statistique du Québec, 2024). In 2023, the largest immigrant groups were from France (13%), Cameroon (11.8%) and China (11.1%), followed by Algeria (4.7%), Morocco (4.7%), Tunisia (4.2%) and Haiti (4.2%). Aside from France, most immigrants come from countries that differ culturally from Quebec to a large degree, particularly in terms of religion, customs and values (Dulude, 2008; Hofstede, 2010), although more than 65% of them can communicate in French (ISQ, 2024).

In general, immigrants are highly qualified. In 2006, 51% held a university degree, up from 15.4% in 1981, and this percentage has continued to grow (Boudarbat & Boulet, 2010). Yet many are employed in positions below their qualifications. In Canada as a whole, Frank and Hou (2017) report that 29.6% of immigrants are overqualified for their jobs, versus 12% of native-born workers, and this overqualification is said to be three times worse in Quebec than in the rest of Canada (Béji & Pellerin, 2010; Gauthier, 2016). Many immigrants thus experience low job satisfaction and limited access to decision-making roles (Gauthier, 2016). There are also significant wage gaps between them and native workers (Boudarbat & Ebrahimi, 2016; Malambwe, 2017).

To date, no binding international legal instruments regulate immigration and immigrant labour, aside from general frameworks or sectoral agreements (Carlier & Crépeau, 2017). This raises key questions: what structural mechanisms can protect immigrant labour, and through what personal efforts can immigrants leverage their contributions to the labour market? To answer these two questions, we will try to determine whether immigrant career success can be increased by cultural intelligence, i.e., the ability to function in a new cultural setting.

## 3. Theory and Hypotheses

We hypothesize that cultural intelligence is associated with immigrant professional success.

### 3.1 Cultural Intelligence and Cultural Quotient

Thomas et al. (2008:127) define cultural intelligence (CI) 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.”* Previous research has shown that workers do better on performance evaluations if they understand and are integrated into the dynamics of their cultural setting, as they are better equipped to navigate complex cultural situations and interpret them appropriately (Jyoti & Kour, 2015, 2017; Ramalu & Subramaniam, 2019; Velez-Calle et al., 2018). CI is measured by Cultural Quotient (CQ), which is divided into four widely recognized domains.

The first domain, Cognitive Cultural Quotient (**CQC**), is knowledge about world cultures, including their history, values and how their social and economic systems function (Magakian & Barmeyer, 2003; Thomas et al., 2008). It reflects how well one understands cultural similarities and differences (Ang et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2008). The second domain, Metacognitive Cultural Quotient (**MCQ**), is awareness of one's cultural cognition and ability to manage such knowledge (Ang et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2008; Velez-Calle et al., 2018). Individuals with high **MCQ** scores are better at adjusting their mental models during and after cross-cultural interactions (Brislin et al., 2006; Triandis, 2006). The third domain, Motivational Cultural Quotient (**MoCQ**), is the energy and

resources that one assigns to cultural challenges and which help turn cultural cognition into action (Ang et al., 2007; Bückner et al., 2015; Velez-Calle et al., 2018). The last domain, Behavioral Cultural Quotient (**BCQ**) is the use of cognitive, metacognitive and motivational resources to adopt culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviours (e.g., gestures, tone, expressions) (Ang et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2008; Velez-Calle et al., 2018).

According to several authors, CI can influence various organizational variables, including perhaps professional success.

### 3.2 Professional Success and Its Cultural Antecedents

We define professional success (PS) as success in achieving an optimal career goal. PS can be subjective or objective (Noah, 2017). Subjective PS is individual satisfaction, while objective PS is based on measurable progress indicators (Pralong, 2011). Because we wish to evaluate PS by examining explicit organizational practices, we will use an objective measure of success, here referred to as “objective career success” (OCS).

According to some authors (Noah, 2017 for example), OCS has two main domains: compensation and hierarchical ranking. Compensation includes both salary level (SL) and salary progression (SP). In an individualized (transactional) HRM logic, SL and SP are negotiated on the basis of proven or potential individual abilities (Roman, 2016), including cultural intelligence. Hierarchical ranking consists of profile/job fit (PJF) and internal mobility (IM). PJF is the alignment between one's qualifications and the job requirements. Overqualified employees, as per ISQ (2014), hold intermediate or elementary-level positions while having post-secondary education. IM is the ability to move within the organization, either vertically (promotion) or horizontally (new roles and responsibilities or moves to other departments) (Janand & Guy-Coquille, 2017; Notais, 2010; Notais & Perret, 2012). We assume that horizontal mobility, while difficult to quantify objectively as a success, can be subjectively perceived as career advancement.

In a transactional HRM paradigm (Roman, 2016), professional success is often tied to personal merit, which, for immigrant employees, includes cultural intelligence. Prior studies have linked income disparities among immigrants to ethnocultural affiliation and national origin (Evra & Kazemipur, 2019; Batisse & Zhu, 2014). Additionally, making friends has been positively correlated with income (Evra & Kazemipur, 2019). To make friends in a foreign country, intercultural skills are required. We therefore propose the following hypothesis within a transactional (individualist) integration paradigm:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Cultural Quotient (CQ) is positively correlated with immigrant objective career success (OCS).*

### 3.3 Organizational Socialization as a Mediating Variable

We consider organizational socialization to be an intermediate stage of professional success. Immigrant workers typically need to pass recruitment tests, complete their probationary period, achieve task proficiency (Garreau & Perrot, 2012; Haueter et al., 2003), integrate into the organization's network of relationships (Fabre & Roussel, 2013) and navigate internal power dynamics. These achievements contribute to organizational socialization (OS), a key milestone in achieving ultimate career success. Following Chao et al. (1994), we divide OS into six domains: **relational integration** (ability to build relationships); **task proficiency** (ability to perform job duties); **knowledge of organizational history** (understanding of traditions, customs and myths); **political awareness** (understanding of power structures and ability to navigate them); **mastery of organizational language** (proficiency in technical terms and jargon); and **knowledge of organizational goals and values** (understanding of formal and informal rules that sustain the organization's integrity).

The literature on cross-cultural management suggests that cultural intelligence (CI) may be crucial to understanding and internalizing the various domains of OS. A relationship has in fact been shown between cultural quotient (CQ) and overall job performance, with cross-cultural adjustment mediating the relationship across the three key areas of OS: organization, group and task (Jyoti & Kour, 2017; see also Haueter et al., 2003). Individuals with high CI also have less anxiety and uncertainty in new environments, thus improving their initiative, confidence and relational integration, and ultimately enhancing their performance (Jyoti & Kour, 2017; Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Rose et al., 2010). Finally, new immigrants with higher CQ use more diverse strategies for cross-cultural adjustment and thus achieve better OS outcomes (Malik et al., 2013). While these findings do not directly address how CQ impacts all of the domains of OS, they do support the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** *Cultural Quotient (CQ) is positively correlated with Organizational Socialization (OS).*

OS has been indirectly linked to professional success indicators, such as internal mobility (IM). In fact, Notais (2010) and Notais and Perret (2012) suggest that IM should be viewed as part of OS because it involves acquiring the social skills and knowledge for a new role. It also encompasses power and learning dynamics related to OS and career development. OS itself encompasses both social and task-related dimensions. A well-socialized individual should thus demonstrate mastery of the organization, in both its symbolic and functional aspects (Jyoti & Kour, 2015; Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Rose et al., 2010). In our transactional hypothesis, where career policies align with flexibility and resource optimization, such individuals are more eligible for career advancement in terms of both compensation and hierarchical ranking. Additionally, a study of 594 full-time employees found that most OS domains are positively correlated with professional achievements, such as income and job satisfaction (Chao et al., 1994). We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

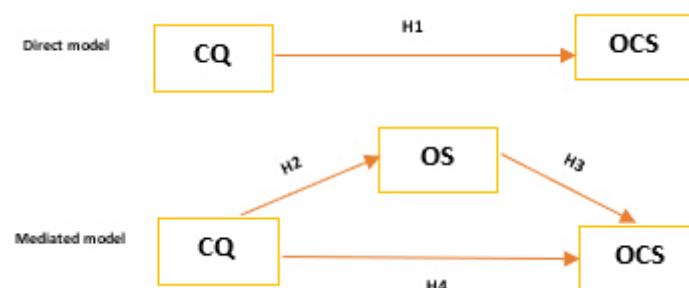
**Hypothesis 3:** *OS is positively correlated with objective career success (OCS) among immigrant workers.*

**Hypothesis 4:** *OS mediates the relationship between cultural quotient (CQ) and OCS among immigrant workers.*

These hypotheses are summarized in the model below.

Figure 1

### Research model and hypotheses



## 4. Methods

### 4.1 Sampling and Data

We received approval from the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (UQAC)'s Research Ethics Committee to collect data via social media by using an online questionnaire. We used purposive rather than probabilistic sampling (Etikan et al., 2016), as we selected only those potential participants who met the criteria, specifically stable full-time employment (at least two years in the same Quebec-based organization) and permanent residency or Canadian citizenship. These criteria ensured that both the participants and the employers were committed to a long-term employment relationship that involved career advancement. To ensure sufficient cultural *otherness*, the sample was also limited to first-generation immigrants, i.e., individuals who were born abroad (in another culture and society) and admitted to Canada at the age of 10 or older (Boudarbat & Ebrahimi, 2016). Finally, we excluded temporary or part-time workers and those workers who arrived before 2012. A total of 103 participants met all of the criteria, a sample size sufficient for our objective of fostering broader discussion, rather than developing a generalizable theory. The sample size also aligned with statistical conventions in its limited number of variables (Gavard-Perret et al., 2012). The participants were 58.3% women and 41.7% men. Most came from Latin Europe (26.2%), West Africa (20.4%), North Africa (16.5%), South America (14.6%) and Central Africa (11.7%). Most lived in Montreal (40.9%) and Quebec City (28%). They were highly educated, with 41.7% holding a master's or doctoral degree, and 29.1% a bachelor's degree.

### 4.2 Measures

To measure cultural quotient (**CQ: independent variable**), we used Ang et al.'s (2007) 20-item scale, reduced to 10 items to be more appropriate for an immigrant population. Examples include: *"When interacting with people from different backgrounds, I consciously apply what I know about their cultures"* (metacognitive CQ); and *"I am enthusiastic about meeting people from other cultures"* (motivational CQ). Organizational socialization (**OS: mediating variable**) was measured using 10 items adapted from Chao et al. (1994), such as: *"I know my organization's key dates and traditions"*; and *"I have friendly relationships with colleagues outside work."* A 5-point Likert scale was used. Objective career success (**OCS: dependent variable**) was measured using four indicators:

- **Salary level (SL):** Ratio of latest salary to Quebec's 2020 minimum wage (\$22,000).
- **Salary progression (SP):** Percentage growth of annual salary over 2 to 5 years.  $SP = (LAS - S1) / (S1 / NYO) \times 100$ , where LAS = latest annual salary, S1 = first year salary and NYO = number of years observed.
- **Internal mobility (IM):** Progression between entry-level and higher positions over 2 to 5 years, with vertical moves scored as 1 and horizontal ones as 0.5. Due to missing data for the "number of hierarchical levels" variable, we assigned it a default value based on the population mean (3.29).  $IM = 100 \times ((TNM / NYO) / 3.29) - NHL / 3.29$ , where TNM = total number of moves, NYO = number of years observed and NHL = number of hierarchical levels.
- **Profile/job fit (PJF):** Gap between qualifications and job level, according to the National Occupational Classification.  $PJF = EP / (ED \times YExp) \times 100$ , where EP = entry position, ED = entry degree and YExp = years of experience.

Objective career success (OCS) was the summation of SL, SP (compensation), IM and PJF (hierarchical rank). IM was weighted at 35%, SP at 25%, SL at 20% and PJF at 20%. More weight was given to IM and SP because we view career success as being more a dynamic progression than a static advantage. In line with classical theories of humanistic management (Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, Frederick Herzberg...), IM was considered to be the most important factor (35%). Overall,  $OCS = 2SL + 2.5SP + 3.5IM + 2PJF$ .

The control variables were organizational relational dynamics (ORD), cultural distance (CD), length of residence (LR), region of origin (RO), age, education level, work experience and entry position (details in appendix).

### 4.3 Analysis

Multiple linear regressions were used to test the predictive power of the independent variables on the dependent variables, with a 95% confidence interval. We initially tested three relationships: CQ-OCS, CQ-OS and OS-OCS. For the quantitative variables, parametric tests (Pearson correlation) were used, while non-parametric tests (Spearman correlation) were applied when categorical variables were involved. In some cases, additional tests were conducted to introduce control variables or to compare mean professional success (t-test) between immigrants from the Global South and those from the Global North (Fraser, 2009; Odeh, 2010).

## 5. Findings

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Table 1

### CQ/OCS and CQ/OCS domains

CQ shows no significant positive correlation with OCS or with any of its indicators ( $r \leq 0.148$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, CQ cannot predict OCS.

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Table 2

### CQ/OS

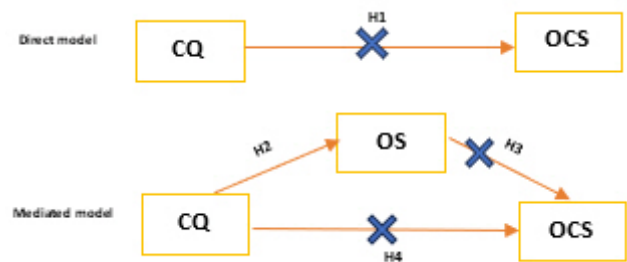
The regression is significant ( $p = 0.000$ ), with an adjusted R-squared of 13.8%, indicating that the model explains 13.8% of the variance in OS. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.384) is also significant ( $p = 0.000$ ), showing that CQ positively influences OS. Additionally, in a stepwise approach (using SPSS), the “cognitive CQ” and “behavioral CQ” domains were the strongest predictors of OS. Finally, the model was controlled for seven control variables and remained significant, despite the significance of the control variables, such as “organizational relational dynamics,” “region of origin,” and “cultural distance.”

Table 3

**OS/OCS correlations**

Organizational socialization (OS) is not significantly correlated with objective career success (OCS). Additionally, none of the OS domains are significantly correlated with the OCS indicators ( $r \leq 0.171$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). The ultimate stage of success, OCS, shows no relationship to the intermediate stage (OS), regardless of the domain. Based on these findings, the conditions required for OS having a mediating role in the relationship between cultural quotient (CQ) and objective career success (OCS) are not met. While CQ influences OS, neither CQ nor OS has an effect on OCS. Therefore, OS does not mediate the relationship between CQ and OCS. Here is a summary of these findings.

Figure 2



However, our findings changed when we refined our analysis by dividing the sample into two main groups: immigrants from the Global North and those from the Global South.

Table 4

**Global North/Global South comparison**

With equal cultural quotient (CQ) and organizational socialization (OS) (Levene's test not significant,  $p = 0.221$  for CQ and  $p = 0.937$  for OS), immigrants from the Global North enjoy a higher level of objective career success (OCS) than do those from the Global South, with a difference of

20.55% (61.62 vs. 41.07; see Table 4). Levene's test is highly significant for this comparison ( $p = 0.003$ ), and the t-test for equality of means is also significant ( $p = 0.06/2$ ).

## 6. Discussion, Contributions and Limitations

### 6.1 The “Absent Presence” of Cultural Intelligence

We sought to examine the relationship between immigrant cultural quotient (CQ) and professional success (PS). We found that CQ predicts PS only at an intermediate stage of success (organizational socialization: OS), in line with previous studies (Jyoti & Kour, 2015, 2017; Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Malik et al., 2013; Malik & Manroop, 2017). The pragmatic domains of CQ, such as motivational and behavioral CQ, are stronger predictors of OS than the more virtual ones, such as cognitive and metacognitive CQ. Indeed, motivation and action normally play a larger role in translating cultural knowledge into appropriate behaviours (Thomas et al., 2008), at least when viewed through the lens of Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory. According to Goffman (2023), social relationships are shaped and facilitated by visible actions, behaviours and how individuals present themselves. This finding aligns with the individualistic view of immigrant integration, often echoed in popular discourse, which suggests that it is up to immigrants to open up to the native population and engage actively in meaningful social interactions.

However, while CQ contributes to intermediate success, it does not predict OCS (ultimate success). There seems to be an “absent presence”<sup>1</sup> effect. Although CQ does play a critical role, it is not enough to achieve the main goal of the employment relationship. One could therefore argue that the cultural competencies of immigrants help them integrate into the organization, but these competencies ultimately benefit the organization more than they benefit the immigrants. By successfully integrating, immigrants enhance the organization's performance by fostering cooperation and bringing diversity-related benefits (Beaudry et al., 2019). Yet this intermediate success does not translate into career success, a finding that challenges the transactional view of immigrant success and supports studies that suggest the personal traits of individual immigrants are disconnected from their career outcomes (Reitz, 2007). This pattern, however, may vary from one country of origin to another, particularly when we compare immigrants from the Global South with those from the Global North.

### 6.2 The North/South Divide

While the relationship between cultural quotient (CQ) and professional success (PS) is not significant across the entire sample, it is significant among the participants from Global North countries (France, Belgium, the United States, etc.). This difference contradicts the transactional hypothesis with its focus on personal merit, as both groups display similar levels of cultural intelligence and organizational socialization. Therefore, beyond individual endeavours—particularly cultural competencies—significant structural barriers may impact the employment trajectory of certain categories of immigrant workers (possibly including involuntary deskilling, lack of recognition of prior experience, ethnic and racial discrimination, inequity in union dynamics, etc.), as shown in previous research (Chowhan et al., 2012; Cools et al., 2021; Diah & Racine, 2017; Dostie & Javdani, 2020). As Chowhan et al. (2012) pointed out, existing theories and models on wage satisfaction seem inadequate to explain wage disparities among immigrants.

Among the Global North participants are those whom Brewster et al. (2017) refer to as “self-initiated expatriates,” who are often White and privileged. Self-initiated expatriates choose to relocate independently to a foreign country to work, typically seeking new professional and personal experiences. Although some may acquire permanent residency, they generally have the option to return to their home countries, unlike “immigrants”—who often move with the intention

of staying long-term or permanently (Ouedraogo & Agbon, 2020). Immigrants typically relocate due to economic, social or political pressures in their countries of origin (Brewster et al., 2017; Ouedraogo & Agbon, 2020). As political, social and economic crises become increasingly widespread worldwide, we believe the distinction between expatriation and immigration is losing relevance, as both are increasingly motivated by similar factors. However, a key difference remains in the more systemic challenges that immigrants face in host countries, challenges that are often more burdensome for those from the Global South (McLaughlin et al., 2017). These systemic barriers can limit their professional opportunities and hinder career advancement, leading to underutilization of their cultural skills. To better understand the conditions for professional success among immigrants, it is important to address these structural constraints.

### 6.3 The Enduring Role of Structural Factors

As CQ fails to predict OCS among all participants, our findings implicitly stress the importance of structural factors, which often precede and sometimes determine individual and organizational initiatives. For instance, Schmidt and Müller (2013) found that even the structure of internal labour markets (job characteristics, socio-hierarchical positioning, etc.) can be influenced by external factors, such as unequal access to education in society. Boyd and Tian (2018) argue that immigrants with STEM degrees (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) from Canadian, American, British or French institutions are more likely to be employed in skilled positions, promoted and paid accordingly. In contrast, immigrants with similar degrees from Global South countries are more likely to be underemployed or work outside the STEM sector.

Union dynamics can also affect internal labour markets, particularly in Quebec—whose unionization rate exceeds 40%, versus 29.9% in the rest of Canada (MTESQ, 2022). A European study by Turner et al. (2014) found that unionized immigrants were twice as likely as their non-unionized peers to earn more than the median hourly wage and receive better pension coverage. Thus, even with equal cultural intelligence, being unionized can be a statistically significant advantage. Nonetheless, unionization does not have a straightforward effect on career success. While Quebec's overall unionization rate is high, it varies widely across sectors. For instance, in 2021, it was only 23.1% in the private sector and as low as 6.1% in accommodation and food services. Immigrants are more likely to work in sectors with low unionization rates, as Cools et al. (2021) showed in a study from Norway. Furthermore, even unionized immigrants may face several challenges. In the Quebec context, Yerochewski and Gagné (2017) showed that union strategies do not always incorporate the intersectionality of class, gender and race relations. Their study reported that when precarious, unionized Black female workers employed by agencies sought union support to denounce discrimination, they were met with a lack of support. According to the authors, unions tend to prioritize employees who already enjoy high job security, thus reinforcing pre-existing inequalities.

Given these challenges and the increasing precariousness of the global labour market, many scholars advocate stronger state regulation of immigrant labour, rather than reliance solely on private governance (Underhill & Rimmer, 2017; Valero et al., 2020). Governments are thus urged to implement International Labour Organization (ILO) recommendations, especially those regarding equal treatment for national and migrant workers, as outlined in such conventions as No. 97 and No. 143 on non-discrimination. For decades, however, these frameworks and recommendations have been treated as “soft law” provisions that leave much room for discretion to national policy-makers. Moreover, with rising job insecurity, vulnerable immigrants may willingly accept precarious contracts (Banerjee & Phan, 2014). In light of these developments, we propose that our findings be considered within this broader structural context.

## 6.4 Contributions, Recommendations, Limitations

This study is one of the few to assess the effect of cultural intelligence (CQ) on the professional success of a strictly immigrant population. Previous studies have evaluated CQ's effects on specific variables, such as performance (Jyoti & Kour, 2015, 2017), work engagement (Ramalu & Subramaniam, 2019) and organizational socialization (Malik et al., 2013). They have also focused on "expatriates," using dependent variables that primarily describe expatriate integration into the organization's socio-economic processes, without addressing concrete career outcomes, such as compensation or hierarchical rank. By studying these variables specifically in relation to CQ in an immigrant population, we shed light on the two models of immigrant socio-professional integration: one emphasizing personal responsibility for success, and the other the influence of systemic factors.

We find that cultural intelligence, or more broadly personal merit, is not sufficient to explain the barriers to immigrant professional success. We acknowledge the determining influence of structural factors, often driven by social inequalities and hierarchies present in society. However, given the limitations of existing structural measures (e.g., unionization, regulation), we believe that development of interactional capacities, such as cultural competencies, should still complement improvements to structural dynamics as supports for socio-professional integration. For example, when immigrants self-organize to defend their rights or to access resources (Choudry & Thomas, 2013), they may need to deploy cultural cognition and adopt cross-cultural behaviours to negotiate with their Quebecois partners. We conclude that cultural intelligence is essential when understood as an input into a collective dynamic rather than as an individual discriminant. This perspective offers a hybrid approach between valuing personal merit and implementing structural support measures. Therefore, we encourage future research to explore CQ from a collective perspective, particularly in negotiations with structural actors.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of this research, beginning with the sample size. Because the inclusion criteria were highly selective, the sample was relatively small. Although the 103 participants were sufficient for our objectives, future studies should use a larger sample. The second limitation was the study design. Ang et al.'s (2007) cultural quotient scale might be criticized for oversimplifying intercultural relationships. Additionally, as the measures are self-reported, they may suffer from social desirability bias (Alon et al., 2016; Velez-Calle et al., 2018). Furthermore, we made some subjective decisions when adapting this scale to our needs. We thus recommend that future research evaluate CQ using the full CQ scale. Lastly, we suggest complementing our quantitative framework with qualitative studies or exploratory multivariate analysis methods to gain a broader understanding.

## Notes

[1] Expression borrowed from Orlikowski (2010), though used here in a different sense.

[2] See Fabre & Roussel (2013), Elanain (2014)

[3] See Fabre & Roussel (2013)

[4] Ibid

[5] see ([https://chambreuil.com/public/2012/12/Dimensions\\_Culturelles.pdf](https://chambreuil.com/public/2012/12/Dimensions_Culturelles.pdf)) .

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## Appendix 1 : Questionnaire (Administered in French)

### Faire carrière au Québec : défis culturels du travailleur immigré récent

**Section préliminaire** : Avant de commencer à répondre aux questions, veuillez vérifier si vous êtes admissible à cette étude.



**NB** : A ce niveau du questionnaire, si le répondant ou la répondante remplit tous les critères d'inclusion à l'étude, en cliquant sur "D'accord, compris", et ensuite sur "Suivant", le questionnaire se poursuivra. Si, par contre, il ou elle ne remplit pas lesdits critères, le questionnaire se terminera.

**Section I** : A chacune des questions contenues dans cette section, cochez l'attitude qui vous correspond. Si vous ne voulez pas répondre à une question, cochez l'option « sans réponse » (disponible dans la version en ligne).



**Section II** : En vous référant à l'organisation où vous avez travaillé pendant au moins 2 ans à temps plein au Québec, répondez aux questions suivantes. Au cas où vous avez travaillé dans plus d'une organisation à temps plein pendant au moins deux ans, référez-vous à la plus récente pour répondre à ces questions.



**Section III** : En vous référant à la même organisation que dans les questions précédentes, notamment la plus récente où vous avez travaillé pendant au moins 2 ans à temps plein, veuillez répondre aux questions suivantes.



**Section IV** : En vous référant à la même organisation que dans la section précédente, veuillez répondre aux questions aux questions suivantes :



**NB** : Si oui, le questionnaire se poursuit. Si **non**, il s'achève.



**NB** : Si oui, le questionnaire se poursuit. Si **non**, il s'achève.



**NB** : Si oui, le questionnaire se poursuit. Si **non**, il s'achève.



**Question de fin** : Avant de quitter le questionnaire, dites-nous si vous êtes intéressé(e) à prendre part éventuellement à une entrevue avec le chercheur principal

- ☐ Non  
☐ Oui (Veuillez contacter le chercheur principal)

**Tirage au Sort** : Désirez-vous participer à notre tirage au sort pour gagner un chèque-cadeau de 100 \$ ?

- ☐ Non, merci  
☐ Oui (Veuillez fournir votre adresse courriel)

Merci pour votre participation !

## Appendix 2 : Measures of Control Variables

Organizational Relational Dynamics (control variable): This construct encompasses 3 key variables: LMX (Leader-Member Exchange); TMX (Team-Member Exchange); and POS (Perceived Organizational Support). The LMX scale by Liden and Maslyn (1998)<sup>2</sup> was adapted to assess the degree of trust and quality of collaboration with the hierarchical supervisor. The TMX scale is the one validated by Seers et al. (1995)<sup>3</sup>. "This scale measures the degree to which members of the same team help and collaborate in their work" (Fabre & Roussel, 2013, p. 13). Finally, we use the perceived organizational support (POS) scale validated by Eisenberger et al. (1986)<sup>4</sup>. Similar to Fabre and Roussel (2013), we opt for its reduced form, which we adapt in accordance with the lessons learned from the pre-test.

Other control variables: Apart from Organizational Relational Dynamics, we used six (6) control variables. As mentioned earlier, these variables enabled us to test the effect of potential exogenous explanatory factors on the main statistical relationships of the study. These variables were cultural distance, length of residence, region of origin, age, education, professional experience and position level held at entry.

### Measuring the "cultural distance" variable

To measure the cultural distance between Quebec and the immigrant's country of origin, we used Grange's method (1997). Based on Hofstede's results, the cultural dimensions are represented as the coordinates of a point with 4 axes in 4 dimensional space:

- M1: Axis of hierarchical distances
- M2: Axis of uncertainty avoidance
- M3: Axis of individualism
- M4: Axis of masculinity.

In this 4-dimensional space, cultures  $C^i$  and  $C^j$  are represented by coordinate points, such that culture  $C^i$  is located at  $(m_{i1}, m_{i2}, m_{i3}, m_{i4})$  and culture  $C^j$  at  $(m_{j1}, m_{j2}, m_{j3}, m_{j4})$ . For Grange (1997), the cultural distance " $D^{ij}$ " is the square root of the differences between indices of the same type. This method is based on an arbitrary extension of the geometric definition of distances, thus providing us with the following formula:

$$D^{ij} = \sqrt{(m_{i1} - m_{j1})^2 + (m_{i2} - m_{j2})^2 + (m_{i3} - m_{j3})^2 + (m_{i4} - m_{j4})^2}$$

Finally, the scores for each dimension for each country based on Hofstede's work were taken from Schneider et al. (2003, pp. 91-92) and Meier (2013, p. 38) (see Appendices 3 and 4). For some countries, scores were imputed from those of their respective regions. For instance, all Central African countries received the score of Cameroon, and Martinique received the scores of Guadeloupe<sup>5</sup>. The scores for Haiti were from the same document (see footnote), while those for Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire were from Ongodo (2006).

Given the dimensional scores below, let's use Grange's formula (1997) to determine the cultural distance ( $D^{Qc-Benin}$ ) between Quebec and Benin, a West African country.

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### Table 4 Determining the Cultural Distance between Quebec and Benin (Example)

Source: Adapted from Dulude (2008, p. 21) and Schneider et al. (2003, pp. 91-92)

$$D(Qc - Benin) = \sqrt{(75 - 20)^2 + (60 - 54)^2 + (54 - 77)^2 + (45 - 46)^2} = \sqrt{3375}$$
$$D(Qc - Benin) = 58$$