RESEARCH ROUNDTABLES

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Experience, Intelligence, and the Adult Third Culture Kid Advantage: A Qualitative Research Study

Elizabeth S. Wolfe
Regent University
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Abstract

A deficit of empirical evidence exists on why and how adult third culture kids (ATCKs), those who have spent a portion or all of their childhood in a country outside their passport (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), who hold the potential to advantage in this arena, could thrive as set apart from peers raised in a mono-cultural setting. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study aimed to extend the research by utilizing the experiential learning theory (ELT) and the constructs of cultural intelligence (CQ), obtaining rich data from purposeful participants' lived experiences to answer the research question: Why does upbringing in a country or culture other than the individual's passport add an advantage over peers raised only in their country of birth to leadership in globalized organizational leadership scenarios? Data collection took place through virtual interviews with four ATCK participants gathered through convenience sampling. Three interview questions were asked. The analysis resulted in 25 concept codes, which were distilled into eight themes anchored to the ELT and CQ constructs. The results evidenced three advantageous skills: observation, empathy, and intuition. For ATCKs, these skills are embedded in core processes, advancing them to lead in culturally dynamic organizations. The lived experiences of the participants affirmed the theoretical validity of the ELT and CQ as aspects of professional acumen. Further research could extend the theoretical literature by investigating aspects of spiritual learning and practitioner literature by developing recruiting frameworks for organizations to employ ATCKs toward an inclusive culture and diversity management.

Keywords: experiential learning theory, cultural intelligence, ATCKs, leadership

There is a deficit of empirical evidence available about why and how adult third culture kids (ATCKs), those who have spent a portion or all of their childhood in a country other than their passport (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), who hold the potential to advantage in this arena, could thrive as set apart from peers raised in a mono-cultural

setting. In a rapidly globalizing world where the success of multinational companies relies heavily on equipping their leadership with global competencies (Ng et al., 2009), there is an opportunity for individuals with a high cultural aptitude to thrive, perhaps even be industry leaders. Wonderment arises: Who can fill these globally minded leadership roles? Is there a demographic of people being raised to develop competencies of cultural acumen, poising them to take places of leadership in multinational organizations as adults? Furthermore, if this demographic exists, are they being equipped and engaged to actualize into leadership roles in a globalized organizational construct?

Organizations have engaged in programs for employees to earn the multicultural skillsets needed to lead in a globalized climate, ranging from in-house diversity training to cross-cultural assignments (Ng et al., 2009). Practical programming finds a basis in experiential learning theory (ELT) developed by Kolb (1984), with evidence of the value added for the leaders who participate (Ng Et al., 2009; Erez et al., 2013). ELT examines experience's crucial role in effective adult learning and development (Ng et al., 2009). Cultural intelligence (CQ), defined as a person's ability to be effective in cross-culturally diverse settings (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016), thematically pervades discussion around leadership aptitude and efficacy. As utilized in multinational organizational leadership scenarios, ELT is employed to determine if the programs result in higher levels of CQ by those who participate. The results of these programs are the subject of current research; however, a gap exists in using ELT to compare the acquisition of CQ post-childhood from those raised solely in their passport country and those who develop it over time through adolescence, immersed in a foreign context.

To perform this qualitative research, purposeful participants, who understand and have experienced the issue at hand (Winston, 2021), were chosen to supply data via open-ended interview questions. The criterion for the participants includes ATCKs who have spent a minimum of 1 year of childhood living in a country other than their passport country, ATCKs who are presently serving in a globalized organizational leadership setting, ATCKs who have served in a globalized organizational leadership setting for a minimum of 5 years, and ATCKs who serve on leadership teams or in a group leadership setting (not solo). With ELT and the concepts of CQ as a framework, these purposeful participants were inquisitively engaged to glean data toward the discovery of information to aid in answering the research question.

Theoretical learning outcomes have been proposed in research that collaborates ELT and CQ (Erez et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2009); however, applications of these outcomes have yet to be specifically reviewed in practical settings with participants who lived all or a portion of their developmental years in a foreign context. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to extend the research by utilizing ELT and working with the conceptual constructs of CQ, obtaining rich data from purposeful

participants' lived experiences to answer the research question: Why does upbringing in a country or culture other than the individual's passport add an advantage over peers raised only in their country of birth to leadership in globalized organizational leadership scenarios?

Theories and Concepts

Experiential Learning Theory

ELT was first developed by David Kolb (1984), building on the foundation of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget to create an experiential theory different from existing cognitive and behavioral learning theories. Learning in ELT is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984; Kolb et al., 2001). Within the ELT, there are two methods of obtaining experience: concrete experience and abstract conceptualization (Kolb et al., 2001). In ELT, there are two methods of transforming experience: reflective observation and active experimentation (Kolb et al., 2001).

These elements are logically connected and make up the four-stage learning cycle of ELT: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting, which allows learning from experience (Ng et al., 2009). Concrete experiences are immediate and tangible (Ng et al., 2009). Interactions between people and what is felt and understood from daily experiences (Kolb, 1984) launch the learning process. These events are then considered and interpreted into a symbolic understanding of what happened (Ng et al., 2009), which is abstract conceptualization in the ELT. After the individual experiences and understands, learning continues with action. Next, the person processes internally through reflective observation (Ng et al., 2009), and active thinking begins to transform the experience toward functioning. Finally, active experimentation involves doing and taking what has been internally processed and understood into the external world through action (Ng et al., 2009). The cyclical learning flow begins with concrete experiences providing the foundation for reflection and concept-building, which are then actively tested (Kolb et al., 2001). Individuals first grasp an experience and then transform the data into intelligence (Ng et al., 2009). The holistic theoretical concept of experiential learning provides a foundation for this research to embark on a discovery process, determining if ATCKs' childhood experiences produce knowledge that gives them a professional edge over mono-cultural peers. Keeping the research question central to this project, the concepts of ELT served to formulate the following interview question:

- IQ1 - How do you feel your developmental experiences from your childhood and adolescence contributed to your globalized identity and cross-cultural leadership skillsets?

Cultural Intelligence

Research affirms that CQ, the ability to function and manage culturally diverse scenarios effectively, can be learned (Ng et al., 2009); however, the learning platform influences the longevity of the lifespan of the skillsets. Pollack and Van Reken (2009) affirmed that skills acquired in developmental years internalize and become part of the individual's core processes. ACTK's opportunity to acquire CQ from childhood potentially boosts their value to multinational work teams and organizations. CQ is comprised of four ways of abstracting individual intelligence: metacognitive intelligence, cognitive intelligence, motivational intelligence, and behavioral intelligence (Ng et al., 2009).

Metacognitive intelligence is the ability to be consciously aware amid intercultural experiences, emphasizing the mental capacity to obtain and understand in culturally diverse settings while maintaining self-control and a sober mind (Ng et al., 2009). Ng et al. (2009) expanded this into planning, monitoring, and revising before, during, and after experiences have taken place. Operating with metacognitive CQ requires high-level thinking and agility on all sides of multicultural encounters. People with cognitive CQ can anticipate, understand, compare, and contrast elements of cross-cultural scenarios (Ng et al., 2009). The emphasis is on knowledge of diverse social, legal, and economic systems, resulting in accurate expectations and lowered reactionary responses (Ng et al., 2009).

The ability to cope with unfamiliar dynamic situations by focusing on what can be learned from the apparent cultural differences is motivational CQ (Ng et al., 2009). There are two types of motivation: intrinsic, including self-efficacy, and extrinsic (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016; Ng et al., 2009). Intrinsically motivated individuals seek challenges and push themselves into exploration to expand capacities through learning (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016), which produces self-confidence about interacting in diverse, dynamic situations (Ng et al., 2009). In contrast, external motivation aims to meet a goal outside the work (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016), depending on someone or something else to foster determination toward achievement. Behavioral CQ is the ability to operate appropriately for a broad spectrum of stations and exhibits culturally appropriate "words, tones, gestures, and facial expressions" (Ng et al., 2009, p. 515). A person who acts according to rules acceptable in a unique cultural setting and adjusts to dynamic environments operates at a high level of behavioral intelligence (Erez et al., 2013). Behavioral CQ includes dexterity in verbal and nonverbal communication, drilling down to gestures and facial expressions that are nuanced from

culture to culture (Erez et al., 2013). The literature agreed that all four CQ elements directly correlate to success in multicultural organizational settings. Ng et al. (2009) postulated that the elements of CQ enhance the effectiveness of ELT, and discovering international experiences provided concrete experiential opportunities to receive feedback toward learning. Literature and current research on CQ and its implications for ATCKs, coupled with the research question, cultivated the following interview question:

- IQ2 - How have concrete experiences and learning in formative years impacted your values, motivation, and perceived levels of cultural intelligence?

Adult Third Culture Kids

Living abroad a portion or all of their developmental years increases awareness of cultural diversity for third culture kids (TCKs), who develop valuable tools for interaction in the areas of cross-cultural, observational, social, and linguistic skillsets for survival in their formative years and application in adulthood (Pollack & Van Reken, 2009). These personal skills heighten sensitivity to intimate cultural cues in cross-cultural settings and carry the potential to be bridge builders in professional careers (Pollack & Van Reken, 2009). Individual learned and lived experiences cause ATCKs to bring unique and personalized perspectives to a scenario (Pollack & Reken, 2009). For ATCKs who lived cross-culturally with parents who served in humanitarian, non-profit, or ministry vocations, there is a motivation and moral value placed on learning about host cultures to work and thrive. Qualitative interviews conducted by Stokke (2013) populated unplanned testimonies of the significant influence of positive parental attitude and approach on the ACTKs' worldview. Conventional training for adult expatriate, international businesspersons cannot impose motivation or values; however, these are key to success rates (Stokke, 2013). Research notes that learning experiences gained in developmental years constructively influence the adjustment abilities of adult expatriates (Selmer & Lauring, 2014). Due to globalization, ATCKs' expatriate experiences and heightened cultural awareness highlight them as potential sources for international business careers (Nash, 2020).

ATCKs have concrete experiences in culturally diverse settings during formative years, cultivating an opportunity to enact the ELT, centralizing the role of experience in the learning process (Kolb et al., 2001) toward obtaining high levels of CQ. The research is clear about the potential available from ACTKs' experiential learning in the seminal years, skills development, and cultural intelligence. The question is: Why is this different from their mono-cultural peers? How does that translate to the successful corporate leadership of multinational organizations or international business scenarios?

Sourcing from the literature to glean a greater understanding to answer the research question, the following interview question was formed:

- IQ3 - How does your upbringing as a TCK influence your ability to discern what is happening in dynamic cultural scenarios, acting appropriately to resolve conflict with diverse team members in the workplace?

There is a connection between ELT and cultural intelligence (CQ) that converges with ATCKs. The ELT states that learning experiences are intentionally cultivated, engaging participants to actively develop intellectually and emotionally (Erez et al., 2013), and when applied to cultural aptitude, undergirds the acquisition of CQ. CQ carries capacities for learning that enhance the translation of expatriate vocational experiences into desired learning outcomes through ELT functions of "experiencing, reflecting, observing, and experimenting" (Ng et al., 2009, p. 514). The multicultural experiences of ACTKs could link to the development of CQ, equipping them to handle adjustment and integration in host cultures with keen awareness, a skill unnatural in mono-cultural adults (Selmer & Lauring, 2014). The dynamic environment of multinational organizations staffed by individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and therefore expectations (Erez et al., 2013), necessitates leaders to operate with a high level of CQ. ATCKs may have an advantage to succeed, even lead, in multi-cultural and diverse industries when learned experiences are transformed into high levels of cultural intelligence, giving them a potential advantage over mono-cultural peers. As explained in the following methods section, qualitative data was collected through interviews with purposeful participants to cultivate empirical evidence to answer the research question.

Methods and Procedures

Interview Questions

Working from the literature, based on ELT and the concept of CQ tied to ATCKs, interview questions were asked of purposeful participants aimed to glean deep-level data toward answering the research question of why upbringing in a country or culture other than the individual's passport adds an advantage over peers raised in a mono-cultural setting to leadership in globalized organizational leadership scenarios? ELT conceptually holds that knowledge is ascertained through experiences that transform an individual (Kolb, 1984; Kolb et al., 2001). Concrete experiences and abstract conceptualization play equal roles in ELT's concept of knowledge acquisition (Kolb et al., 2001). ATCKs have tangible experiences in their childhood that are different from what they would have faced if they were raised in their passport country. The practical fact of the diversity among countries and cultures causes people to function differently. The ability to operate in and manage culturally diverse scenarios is the premise for CQ

(Ng et al., 2009). Children internalize the skills learned in their developmental years, and these become assets as a part of their core processes (Pollack & Van Reken, 2009). The interview questions were asked to inquire how these skills provide an advantage in the participants' adult vocation. The interview questions were asked as follows:

- IQ1 - How do you feel your developmental experiences from your childhood and adolescence contributed to your globalized identity and cross-cultural leadership skillsets?
- IQ 2 - How have concrete experiences and learning in formative years impacted your values, motivation, and perceived levels of cultural intelligence?
- IQ 3 - How does your upbringing as a TCK influence your ability to discern what is happening in dynamic cultural scenarios, acting appropriately to resolve conflict with diverse team members in the workplace?

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Design.

To answer the research question, I conducted qualitative research using phenomenological research methodology. Within qualitative research, phenomenological research seeks to understand the essence of a lived experience from participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Citing Moran (2000), the definition of phenomenology given by Gill (2014) is the study of something that happened to someone in their lived experience. Miles et al. (2020) emphasized choosing phenomenological research when examining the experience and its implications for a study. Phenomenology employs Giorgi's (2012) method of descriptive phenomenology, which is both descriptive and interpretive.

According to Gill (2014), the Giorgi method sought to describe the essence of a phenomenon by focusing on meaning units and is best utilized to understand an occurrence that is generally shared by multiple individuals. The research question focused on ATCKs' individual experiences in their developmental years outside their passport country and sought to understand how this impacts their performance in diverse leadership settings. Through the data collection, the descriptions of the participants' actual experiences served as an informative control. The interpretation provided insight into what Giorgi (2012) called "non-given" factors of this methodology to answer the research question (p. 4). Interviews were conducted with purposeful participants. The actual experiences lived were heard and recorded precisely as articulated and then, following Giorgi (2012), were reflected upon to translate the acts toward meaningful conclusions.

Purposeful Participants

Purposeful participants were chosen, as they understood and had experience within the scope of the research question (Winston, 2021). The minimum sample size was at least three individuals to acquire enough breadth of experiential data to achieve saturation of the issue (Gill, 2014). Additionally, the participant threshold was five, as a small sample group was necessary to thoroughly investigate all descriptions and data given (Gill, 2014). The criterion of the participants chosen were ATCKs who (a) had spent a minimum of one year of childhood living in a country other than their passport country, (b) were presently serving in a globalized organizational leadership setting, (c) had worked in a globalized organizational leadership setting for a minimum of 5 years, and (d) were presently on leadership teams or in a group leadership setting (not solo).

Due to accessibility and time constraints, I employed convenience sampling, choosing participants I knew. To ward against sampling bias, I used the stated criteria to structure the inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). Furthermore, to reduce any opportunity for bias resulting from my relational proximity to the participants, financial compensation was not issued for involvement in the project (Miles et al., 2020); however, I expressed my gratitude was expressed in written and verbal form. Direct communications were emailed to five potential participants, describing the project's scope, participation requirements, and time and technology requirements. The email invited the individual to participate in the interview process with a stated response timeline. Participants were selected who best related to the research question and who had the availability to engage and the most relevant experience related to the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2020). Four participants were selected from the potential sampling of five to meet methodology boundaries (Gill, 2014).

Conducting the Interviews.

 After the purposeful participants had agreed and been selected, the process of conducting the interviews was executed. Interviews were scheduled with each participant and conducted via Microsoft Teams, a digital conferencing platform. An invitation link with the date and time was emailed to each participant. Interviews were audio recorded using the Microsoft Teams Transcribe, and I typed notes in a Microsoft Word document while recording the participant's responses. Notes were documented in writing of nonverbal observations and tone of voice; however, for ethical purposes, the video recordings were permanently deleted. My goal was to record the depth of the participants' experiences within the project's scope, providing data to answer the research question (Gill, 2014).

The interview opened with questions to relax the participant before they begin sharing about their current leadership role and primary historical factors from their expatriate

childhood experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To obtain data on the participants' lived experiences, three open-ended interview questions were asked to determine the essence of the participants' lifeworld related to the research question. As the interviewer, I acted as the exchange's chief listener, allowing participants to disclose their complete responses to each question. However, when the participant did not directly answer the question or I needed further details, I restated and probed to keep the interview directed toward obtaining data that would answer the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the three interview questions had been posed and thoroughly answered, the interview was closed with gratitude and an affirmation of confidentiality, which concluded the audio recording (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Final notes of observations were written in the Word document.

Data Organization Procedure

The data organization process began with the interview files. The recordings from the audio interviews were transcribed using the Transcribe feature in Microsoft Teams. The transcript was generated in a Microsoft Word document and downloaded. My typed notes created during the interviews were used to support understanding and analysis of the data in the transcript. The transcripts were read for understanding. Intellectus Qualitative software was employed after I collected and reviewed the data. This tool was used to analyze and provide codes for the data based on eight themes tied to the literature I input with empirical sources. The output of Intellectus Qualitative was reviewed and audited to ensure concept codes and themes aligned with the study boundaries and the research question. Additionally, codes were added by the researcher using concept coding (Miles et al., 2020), which added to the output of Intellectus Qualitative.

Concept coding was employed to assign macro-levels of meaning to the data (Miles et al., 2020). Broader than a single action or observation, a concept is a short phrase that issues symbolic representation to a suggested meaning (Miles et al., 2020). Rather than a specific behavior, a concept suggests an idea or process by analytically harmonizing small to large sections of data into a word or phrase that connects holistically with the research question (Miles et al., 2020). The Intellectus Qualitative software issued concept codes following the input of the research problem and question, as well as theory scope. Concept codes produced by Intellectus Qualitative software are labeled with "AI" before the code name. I added additional concept codes to allow for the diversity of the interviewee's background and experiences to inform the result and ensure the research question was answered. Subsequently, I organized the data into sections by theme with corresponding concept codes, utilizing the output from Intellectus Qualitative, in a table with frequency listed.

According to Gill (2014), the Giorgi phenomenological research method requires bracketing. Bracketing is defined as the researcher placing boundaries (brackets) around

themselves to limit the influence of personal bias on a study (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The researcher restricts themselves by withholding assumptions and opinions to validate the participant's perspective while maintaining contact with present reality (Thomas & Sohn, 2023). There is no universally agreed-upon timing for bracketing in qualitative research; however, Giorgi (2012) advocated for bracketing to be held off until the data analysis section (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Saturation

Saturation is achieved when nothing new occurs, such as by interviewing or including new participants (Winston, 2021). Additionally, categoric and thematic saturation occurs when new data does not supply further ideas to answer the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Gill (2014), the Giorgi method requires at least three participants, calling for a small sample size. The scope of this research proposal was limited to one research question and three interview questions. To obtain adequate testimonies to answer the research question, saturation for this project occurred at four participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis section is ordered by themes with corresponding coded responses for all four participants. Excerpts from interview transcripts are included, supporting each concept code. A section on themes organized in alignment with the coding process distills the concept codes into grouped patterns (Miles et al., 2020). I edited the transcripts to eliminate grammar errors and content redundancy; however, raw participants' responses to explain lived experiences were maintained. The concept codes are clustered into themes. The themes are used to answer the research question.

To understand the testimony of the participants from the lifeworld described, I assumed a discovery posture toward the data (Giorgi, 2012). Giorgi's (1985) method, as cited in Gill (2014), offers four steps for data analysis: (a) a complete reading of the participant's testimony to sense the experience holistically, (b) reading to define and mark meaning units, (c) use of Husserl's imaginative variation to examine meaning units, and , (d) collaborating and synthesize meaning units into a concise structure of the phenomenon, which is the essence (Gill, 2014). The use of the Intellectus Qualitative software compiled concept codes organized within themes I provided based on theoretical constructs with empirical sources. A theme description precedes the related cluster of concept codes with frequencies provided in table format. The supporting testimonies from the purposeful participants provide a holistic presentation of the data analysis in pursuit of answering the research question.

Theme Description for Concrete Experience

Concrete experience is experiencing. Concrete experiences are immediate and tangible events that happened in a person's formative years that shape learning, understanding, and behavior. (Ng et al., 2009). Interactions between people and what is felt and understood from daily experiences launch the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984). The following codes emerged from analyzing and rereading the interview transcripts from all four participants. The codes contained within the theme are included in Table 1 (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Table 1: Code Frequencies for Concrete Experience

Concept code	Frequency
AI: Family influence on cultural intelligence	4
AI: Language as cultural connection	4
AI: Crisis resilience leadership	4

Code Excerpts: AI: Family Influence on Cultural Intelligence

"I told you all this because I think because my parents instilled that curiosity in me early on" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

"I was a translator for my family. My parents learned Portuguese, and so did I. But soon enough, both myself and my brother, we spoke Portuguese fluently and my parents didn't (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

I realized my mom often was so kind to go pick them up because we had to prepare the chicken early on and there was a lot. So, I saw my parents be kind. They were very kind to the workers. They were very poor people, but they were so kind to them and my mom always gave free stuff, she was so generous. There was something about my mom that I hold on to today. She was generous. On Sundays when we are about to close, she would just wrap whatever was left over up and give it to every worker. Every worker would get a bag of food, and till today I remember she was just always, always generous, always giving. When we would go to someone's home she would always tell me never go empty handed, always bring something. When she would see someone in need, unless it was something strange, like I always my memory of my mom was just always helpful, always giving and more than you expect not just a little bit. She would go always above and beyond to bless the people that were around her. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

I think my parents' openness to cultures and there they instilled curiosity in my heart, they instill faith. I was not afraid to go to new places just because my dad and my mom were both examples for me of going to a new place, of starting new things. And my dad went to Brazil with $1,000. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

Code Excerpts: AI: Language as Cultural Connection

"And early on, I remember my parents just telling me that I needed to learn as many languages as possible" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

My parents, because there's Mandarin and there's Hakka. Hakka is a dialect, a Chinese dialect. My dad is Hakka. My mom is Taiwanese. There is a Taiwanese dialect and the Hakka dialect. But my dad really wanted our whole family to speak Hakka and not just Mandarin, because Mandarin is the standard language for all education. He did not want me just to learn Mandarin. He wanted us to learn Hakka because he felt that we needed to understand first our own culture and even regardless of where you are in the world, you're always, he always told me you're always going to look Asian and so you need to know and understand your culture. And so that was a beautiful thing. My dad had definitely foresight because I know how difficult it is to maintain a language when you are not in your home country. And he really made a point. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

"Experience early on, like I just enjoyed it. I just loved hearing about different cultures and then hearing different languages. And I often would hear Hakka Portuguese" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

My mom learned Hakka so that she could speak with my grandparents and so that's the beginning of my love for languages, because I spoke Hakka at home and then Portuguese at school, and then when I was in fifth grade, my dad and my mom put me in like English classes. So, then I started learning English and taking English as a foreign language at a kind of special school. I was already early on doing three languages. And because of that, I just naturally always enjoyed languages. Because it was fostered and my dad talked about how important it was to know languages. When I think about my growing up years, that is part of my love for culture, my love for languages and I'm able to see it; it blends together. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

Code Excerpts: AI: Crisis Resilience Leadership

> I think that's very important that I grew up around people who remember crisis, political crisis, economic crisis. Some people even remembered wars and we even had war next door to us. So, I think how it impacted me. I do think that I have the growth mindset, right. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

> So basically, my years growing up in Bulgaria, right. I'll use this example that I actually thought about many times. In the world of business, you have CEOs, right, like a CEO that is like you need the CEO for a growth, right. But also, you need, you need CEOs like let's say when things are good with the economy, things are growing, you need a CEO with a growth mindset, right? And I think then on the other, on the flip side, you have a CEO for like war times, right? When you have to cut budgets, the economy is not doing well, company is going for something really, really challenging. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

> I have lower expectations. So, I'm more of a type of person that I have like higher appreciations, lower, lower expectations and that's I think again is because of how I grew up. I can also give you an example on the flip side, seeing people that grew up here in the USA in having good times and they don't remember bad times. So, they haven't even heard about bad times like that equation is flipped with having more expectations and less appreciations, right. It's all about expecting, expecting, expecting. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

> I grew up with, even though I was fortunate enough where my family was doing OK, we were sort of like considered like upper middle class. Really, I saw the scarcity around me. I saw the struggle around me, right? And I think, basically, I keep giving this example, a personal example where, let's say, if I complain something to me to my parents who are still alive and then I'll tell my mother. Hey, I struggle with this problem at work and it really sucks and like, it's just kind of like really spinning, spilling out my guts, right? Like how frustrated I'm at work. Like she'll sometimes ask me the question of like, are you getting paid? I'm like, of course I'm getting paid, right? (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

Theme Description for Abstract Conceptualization

Abstract conceptualization is reflecting. Events and experiences are then considered and interpreted into a symbolic understanding of what happened (Ng et al., 2009). Operationally, the individual goes through experiences and then intentionally reflects

in order to understand those experiences. The concept codes contained within the theme are included in Table 2 (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Table 2: Code Frequencies for Abstract Conceptualization

Concept code	Frequency
AI: Identity complexity	4
AI: Cultural identity evolution	2
Global citizenship	3

Code Excerpts: AI Identity Complexity

"The downside is I have a less developed personal identity. I don't have a as much of a unique flavor of person" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

Like the high school type stereotypes kind of fall off as you get older, but I am probably less comfortable than most of my peers in a homogeneous situation that I don't think that I grew up with the same kind of formative experiences of standard party backyard BBQs or sports games that I feel like I am less at home in a situation where most Americans would probably think that it is just a normal everyday thing. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

Simple things like that I don't have the same and I think that this is getting less important just because we are more connected but a normal American growing up in a single town probably has more shared experiences. They watched the same TV show as their peers. They saw the same sports games. They rooted for the same team. They had a very linear or not maybe not linear, but a much more common high school experience or developmental experience that they developed their motivations and their understanding the world with their peers instead of with new peers. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

"I do feel like I have a hard time integrating into something that might be like a comfortable setting for someone who grew up in America" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

Code Excerpts: AI Cultural Identity Evolution

Well, I think my upbringing, it has a lot to do with who I am, right? I would split my like my makeup of my personality and my tendencies and who I am into two pieces. So, one of them is obviously growing up in a different country, so basically growing up until teenage years. That really stays with me and it's not

going anywhere. I, this is kind of pretty cool, who I am, right? This is sort of like the fabric of my personality, my cultural intelligence, if you will. But then also I would say at 17 years old, then really running into a completely different culture and really experience. Seeing what cultural shock really means, basically it made me up who I am as an adult. I think at the core it's how I grew up, the first 17 years of my life. Basically, like all these kinds of tendencies with me, but then I can't really tell where I can put more weight whether it's like after 17 or before that. But for me the experience of like really coming to a country like USA at 17 years of age was truly transformational. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

Now going back to my original culture, we go there once every two years for four or five weeks. I can tell you that going back to my home country, I feel a foreigner because I also took so much of the American culture as well. It is a paradox. You're asking me about my identity and how much of that makes me as a leader. But I think in a way the paradox is that I think I lost my identity. Honestly, like I yes, I'm Bulgarian. I carry that culture. I know the language and the culture, but I also don't anymore, right? Because I think I've changed. A lot. And I've also like really adapted to different culture. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

Code Excerpts: Global Citizenship

For my global identity I would say it was foundational in my, in my identity. I'm truly just telling you how I perceive my myself and my world, but I feel a citizen of the world. I do not feel like I am from one country more than another. I truly believe I can belong everywhere. I also belong nowhere. It's that, that weird tension you have as a third culture kid. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

And so I definitely feel like it shaped my identity and my global identity in, in the sense of I mean it when I say I love all human beings. I don't feel nationalistic at all, in fact I really, really abhor it. I don't share that everywhere, but I have a very hard time with nationalism. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

"Not that I don't take pride in being an American. Sure, I do. I mean, it's incredible that I got to be an American, but I don't have a nationalistic view" (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025).

Theme Description for Reflective Observation

Reflective observation is thinking. The person processes internally through reflective observation, and active thinking transforms the experience toward functioning (Ng et al., 2009). Participants verbalized what they have experienced and thought as they process events in their formative years and how that shapes their actions as an adult. The concept codes contained within the theme are included in Table 3 (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Table 3: Code Frequencies for Reflective Observation

Concept code	Frequency
AI: Constant cultural processing	3
AI: Adaptability to change	2
AI: Multicultural identity formation	5
AI: Cultural conflict resolution	2
Stress inoculation	2

Code Excerpts: AI Constant Cultural Processing

"Being a TCK where all you really are ever doing is processing, you're constantly processing. You're constantly as a child processing your surroundings and where do I fit" (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)?

Yeah, I think again, as a young TCK, you're just this computer who is absorbing a tremendous amount of information. And then once that's absorbed, you're trying to find filters for it. Like where, what categories am I going to put all this information in? And then how does, how do those categories connect to one another? And so it's like a networking in your brain constantly and trying to find pathways. This constant need to find pathways of connection that's always going on in the background. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

There's so much introspection that happens either consciously or unconsciously when you're at TCK, because you're comparing what you're seeing out there with yourself all the time. And how do I fit and where am I going to go with my actions? And how am I going to decide who I'm going to be? And how am I going to decide that based on what my parents are from? And who, where I'm from based on that as far and also where I'm living at the moment that's influencing me and how is this going to make, shape me and make me fit in, but also be uniquely me. And so I think that absolutely influences discernment

because you're doing that constantly. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

Code Excerpts: AI Adaptability to Change

"Frequently being the new person. My birthday is August 25th, and that was the first day of school and I attended 13 different schools before I graduated high school" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

I do seek to develop value for more than myself, but a group in terms of motivations. I think that I'm undeterred by most change that would deter a lot of other people, and I think that's helped me not be afraid of opportunities that I might miss. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

Code Excerpts: AI Multicultural Identity Formation

I was born in Taiwan, and at 11 months old, my parents moved to Brazil. And I grew up in Brazil until I was about 13 years old. And from 13 on, we were in Memphis, Tennessee for a couple of months and then the rest of the time in Orange County, California. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

And so having grown up in a different, bicultural situation and then later coming to the United States like I got a third culture. I was able to learn different ways of thinking and different points of view. I've learned to adjust to different ideas and see the strengths in every culture. I saw what was actually most effective in every culture. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

"So, I really remember how hard it was, even in Brazil, because I did not fit as a Brazilian, I was Taiwanese, right? And then they always thought I was Japanese because I was Asian" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

And I think about it now that I'm older, I realize, wow, praise God that my parents were open and also mindful enough to expose me and not just to say, well, we're in Brazil, you're just going to learn Brazil and Brazilian culture and we're just going to do that. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

When I think about my growing up years, that is part of my love for culture, my love for languages, and I'm able to see it, it blends together. We were in Brazil and Brazil is full of Japanese and it's full of, especially in Sao Paulo where we lived and we have Chinese in Brazil. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

Code Excerpts: AI Cultural Conflict Resolution

> Now when it comes to conflict resolution, I think that this is also a very cultural thing and I can make a huge difference between the contrast. So in in my culture, conflict is dealt with head on. You have, you have a problem with someone, someone has a problem with you, you'll be a face-to-face conflict resolution right away. Whereas in, in the USA, I think you have to ask a mediator right away, you have to go around and bring five more people and so there are pros and cons to both of them. But I think how it changed me as a leader is that I'm really good at the defense. Like if, for example, someone has a conflict with me, I'm really good at like basically dealing with conflict because I'm very comfortable with it. If someone has a conflict and just directly tells me I have a problem personally with you. I'm like, great, what is it, right? I have no problem with it. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

> So, it's a balancing act. It's not a balance, it's more of a balancing act. So being hyper focused on the hyper aware of the environment and people and what drives them, I think then it just helps me decide what tool to use for conflict resolution. And I might go for a mediation. But also, I want to make sure I'm okay with doing the direct conflict resolution as well. I think if you avoid the conflict and really not talk about it and just like leaving it, leaving it untouched, like just, it's just, I think, crazy and creates a lot of problems. And they don't go away. But then just people, people go away, right? Like they'll say like, well this organization sucks, my boss is not a good person. That's why I left one year later. But I, but I'm like, did you even try to resolve the conflict? (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

Code Excerpts: Stress Inoculation

> I think that the stress inoculation pieces are hugely important. That a growth mindset happens because you're not afraid of failure, rejection, or hardship. And I think in the formative years of my life, I was faced frequent, frequently with those things. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

> I can say any sort of human interaction can create stress, especially in a new situation, and I think that having the same repeated experience over and over inoculated me against a lot of that sort of stress. And so, the motivation, so the value I think that people are relatively the same everywhere in terms of not only basic needs but also basic desires and motivations. It just might manifest itself differently. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

Theme Description for Active Experimentation.

Active experimentation is acting. Active experimentation involves doing and taking what has been internally processed and understood into the external world through action (Ng et al., 2009). Individuals enact behaviors based on what they have experienced, processed, and understood. The concept codes contained within the theme are included in Table 4 (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Table 4: Code Frequencies for Active Experimentation

Concept code	Frequency
AI: Leadership through relationships	4
AI: Pride in work ethic	3
AI: Unorthodox problem-solving	3

Code Excerpts: AI Leadership Through Relationships

"I shouldn't have to worry about it, right? Like somebody else could worry about it, right? But it's hard for me not to be like, I feel that part of my mentorship and my training and loving people" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

It doesn't look the same. I'm not giving out chicken, but it's different. I realized that I give in different ways and maybe most professors will not usually treat a student to coffee, but like, I almost have a hard time like not treating them well. I realized that I lead from relationship. It's very difficult for me to lead without relationship and I want to get to know people more, in a much deeper way than just surface level. I've had to kind of navigate that in, in an institution because it doesn't look the same. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

It's difficult to know how to resolve conflict if you don't take time to listen, and I think being a cultural bridge, the most important thing for me has been listening, taking time to ask questions and taking time to listen to both sides, or listen, because I can assume certain things from my perspective, but from someone else's perspective, it actually may be completely the opposite. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

"They're meant to somehow help you, but it was not perceived that way. And so, so having these conversations, deeper conversations" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

Code Excerpts: AI Pride in Work Ethic

So basically, to me it was really drilled into my head that you need to take pride of your work, right? No matter if it's just like something big or like just something as simple as like even sweeping someone's floor because coming to the United States I really had like the lowest paying jobs, the lowest ranked jobs and whatnot. So if you if you're sweeping the floor or something as simple as that, its like, I would like to actually really then look back and enjoy it and say I made this better, I'm actually proud of this, it looks great versus just completing the job to take a check box and then get paid a couple bucks. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

Taking pride of what you do, no matter how small your task is. To me one thing that I definitely carry. And you don't, you don't see it everywhere, right. A lot of people are doing their job just to good enough. But you can't really take pride of something that is good enough, right? (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

I'm motivated to do a good job, right? Recognition drives me. I do like the recognition. When it's like done in private, I don't want the validation. My motivation is to do a good job and just, they take pride of that. Being able to be proud for my name to be associated with that. And as a leader, just as a leader, I use the example of success for me. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

Code Excerpts: AI Unorthodox Problem-Solving

And I think my values were challenged that day. You're not supposed to break rules. You're not supposed to do these things. But I did it anyway. And that was a catalyst towards me taking really huge risks. And I know that you can't take risks all the time. They need to be thought through. It's not rash or brazen, but there are times when it's worth it. And I see in the work that I do now that has become a deep value. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

And challenging a world where we look at numbers. And say yes, I get where that's important, but the one also matters. And I feel very motivated by hearing a person's story because I know it's their story, but they, it's just one of thousands. And I'm compelled by the stories that I hear and compelled to challenge organizations. I get it. We need to look at numbers. We need to look at the masses. But Jesus clearly didn't only serve the masses. And if we backtrack in the Old Testament, God, before He sent His Son, spoke to the masses, but He also served and spoke to individuals. And then those individuals impacted their worlds. So that is something where I feel a huge, tremendous amount of

motivation in our current world, whereas an organizations grows and they have to have rules and regulations, you have to have marketing, you have to have all of these different facets. I get it. But to not lose sight of the one, because the one could then go on and influence a humongous amount of people with their life. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

Or am I going to say reframe, reframe this and find another way? And what's the end goal? The end goal to everyone just be frustrated? Or is the end goal we move, even if it's just a baby step, we move in the right direction? And cut myself out of it. Cut my own pride out of it. I've learned. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

Theme Description for Metacognitive Intelligence

Metacognitive intelligence is the ability to be consciously aware amid intercultural experiences, emphasizing the mental capacity to obtain and understand in culturally diverse settings while maintaining self-control and a sober mind (Ng et al., 2009). Ng et al. (2009) expanded this into planning, monitoring, and revising before, during, and after experiences have taken place. Operating with metacognitive cultural intelligence requires high-level thinking and agility on all sides of multicultural encounters. The concept codes contained within the theme are included in Table 5 (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Table 5: Code Frequencies for Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence

Concept code	Frequency
Cultural discernment	7
AI: Conflict mediation	4

Code Excerpts: Cultural Discernment

"I think to answer the question of how that has affected me is, I think that I am probably more empathetic to cultural cues and I think that I can more quickly establish someone's motivations or bent or drive" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

"I could quickly determine kind of strengths and weaknesses and also help understand and mitigate conflict" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

"I think that I have seen in an international setting that there's a level of cultural awareness that I have that allows me to make negotiations or in building plans develop more value" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

"I think growing up as a TCK definitely influenced discernment" (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025).

And so I think that absolutely influences discernment because you're doing that constantly. You're trying to figure out what's true and what isn't? Who's lying and who isn't? What's real and what isn't? And I have no interest in fake stuff. I know I learned that in Austria. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

"For someone like me, an adult, I know how I feel about things. I feel like growing up in another country gives you the advantage of constantly deciphering things. What's real, what isn't" (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025).

Discerning people's motivations too. It gives you a thermostat or something you can tell often when someone is not who they say they are. Or I can tell if there's something about this that I'm not feeling is right. And I know the Bible and the Word and the Holy Spirit help us with discernment as well. But it's helped me wake, make wise decisions. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

Code Excerpts: AI Conflict Mediation

I am often the de facto or default arbiter between a lot of inter- or intra-team conflicts. I guess that that's just an observation, not necessarily an official role, but I'm often the person that, that helps solve conflicts between different people on the same team. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

I think that a leader's responsibility is to encourage and manage change and help develop an organization by finding what motivates or influences people, and I think that in those settings I am at an advantage because I can quickly learn what does motivate people or what will allow a team to work together well, and I can identify and solve conflicts in, in group settings. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

I remember my mom once in a, in a bakery in Austria. She wanted to buy this cake and it was a significant enough cake and they wouldn't give her a box to carry it. And she said, well, I could, I buy a box? And they said no. And it became this massive argument between them, because my mom didn't understand, I'm going to purchase the box. Why won't you give it to me? And they just, they weren't having it. It got to a point where they're like, you are a loudmouth American and I'm not going to give you a box just because of that. And the entire bakery now was involved. And I'm a 9-year-old standing in there

thinking, shut up, Mom, you are being so unwise right now. This is not about winning this argument. You're not going to get anywhere. And you just lost an opportunity to reframe this, change how this is all working if you as the believer had just course corrected in the middle, just redirected something. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

I remember that really impacted me in how I saw or understood a situation. I need to be able to discern when I'm not going to get anywhere with a person. So do I leave that place whatever it looks like? Or am I going to say okay, reframe this and find another way? (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

Theme Description for Cognitive Cultural Intelligence

People with cognitive CQ can anticipate, understand, compare, and contrast elements of cross-cultural scenarios (Ng et al., 2009). The emphasis is on knowledge of diverse social, legal, and economic systems, resulting in accurate expectations and lowered reactionary responses (Ng et al., 2009). The concept codes contained within the theme are included in Table 6 (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Table 6: Code Frequencies for Cognitive Cultural Intelligence

Concept code	Frequency
Cultural empathy	3
AI: Cultural bridge builder	9

Code Excerpts: Cultural Empathy

I think to answer the question of how that has affected me is I think that I am probably more empathetic to cultural cues and I think that I'm more, I can more quickly establish someone's kind of motivations or bent or drive. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

That concept or with this way of doing life, and I think it enabled me to empathize, to love better. It enabled me to adjust. And it enabled me to be a bridge because I wasn't bound by the boundaries of like one culture. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

"Because I'm willing and open to listen to other people's motivations and I think that that gets me further than it might than some of my peers in just a purely U.S. situation working with people professionally" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

Code Excerpts: AI Cultural Bridge Builder

"But soon enough, both myself and my brother, we spoke Portuguese fluently. And my parents didn't. And so, I was basically the cultural translator for my family" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

So both without giving away specific details, I can, I can say that in an organizational perspective, it is very easy to be frustrated with other organizations because they operate differently, and so things that you see as common practice and in one organization or not in another. And I could watch a lot of my peers very quickly becoming frustrated with their different nationality counterparts, especially organizationally, because it was hard for them to wrap their minds around that this is a norm for them, even though it's not a norm for me. I don't know if that is a, is a skill that I've, that I've learned or just I think that it has given me. I said empathy before. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

I was able to like I see even those like my husband and I, we both like, I feel like both of us God gave us this role of being bridges. And even in teams, like I remember when we would go into a new team and there will be people with very difficult personalities that will struggle with people in the team. But then for us, like we just, I felt that because I grew up in a different environment and had exposure to different ways of doing things and ways of thinking and being that enabled me to connect with people better, and it allowed me to speak into people's because I connect with them, then I can speak into their life. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

"The building bridges factor as a TCK, I think that's always at the forefront for me" (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025).

It's, I think my growing up experience definitely informed that bridge building, how to make someone feel safe so that when you're talking about issues, and relationship, to my understanding and my experience in all Middle Eastern countries, is paramount. Nothing happens without relationship. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

"And so you're constantly trying to find what do I have in common? What do I have in common with these people? Where do I have a place that we connect" (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)?

So that idea of, all right, what do we have in common? What are the things that are our strengths that bond us, not our needs, not where we're faulty, but what are our assets? And I don't even necessarily mean physical ones. Like what do I

bring to the table? What do you bring to the table? Let's build on those and let's grow those and let's see what happens to invest in another person's either personal or professional growth by taking and journeying with them again on. All right, so who are you? What made you who you are? Tell me about this resilience that I can see in you. Tell me more about how you, how you became such a great whatever and all right, let's go from there. Rather than focusing what you don't have or what you wish you had or what you need, it's you've got these things already. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

"I started not just hearing my parents' view, but I heard my friends, and I was the bridge. I understood both sides. I started understanding both ways and both sides and I realized" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

That was really important. It's difficult to know how to resolve conflict if you don't take time to listen, and I think being a cultural bridge, the most important thing for me has been listening, like listening, taking time to ask questions and taking time to listen to both sides, or listen, because I can assume certain things from my perspective, but from someone else's perspective, it actually may be completely the opposite. They may be trying to help you when you think that they're trying to hurt you. I think taking time to ask questions, taking time to listen. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

Theme Description for Motivational Cultural Intelligence

The ability to cope with unfamiliar dynamic situations by focusing on what can be learned from the apparent cultural differences is motivational CQ (Ng et al., 2009). There are two types of motivation: intrinsic, including self-efficacy, and extrinsic (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016; Ng et al., 2009). Intrinsically motivated individuals seek challenges and push themselves into exploration to expand capacities through learning (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016), which produces self-confidence about interacting in diverse, dynamic situations (Ng et al., 2009). In contrast, external motivation aims to meet a goal outside the work (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016), depending on someone or something else to foster determination toward achievement. The concept codes contained within the theme are included in Table 7 (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Table 7: Code Frequencies for Motivational Cultural Intelligence

Concept code	Frequency
Motivation	4
Journeying with others	4
Empathy and perspective-taking	6

Code Excerpts: Motivation 3

"As a leader, what motivates me is beyond transactional. It's more of an it's all about the people and the relationships" (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025).

"It's like really, I'm motivated to basically be to do a good job, right" (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025).

I'm compelled by the stories that I hear and compelled to challenge organizations that yes, I get it. We need to look at numbers. We need to look at the masses. But Jesus clearly didn't only serve the masses. So that is something where I feel a huge, tremendous amount of motivation in our current world where organizations have to have rules and regulations. But to not lose sight of the one, because the one could then go on and influence a humongous amount of people with their life. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

"She, they had not raised hardly any funds. I mean, they're leaving in May, right? And I'm thinking they had a huge budget and she looked at me and I don't know, it's just like faith from God" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

Code Excerpts: Journeying With Others

I learned so much from Mother Teresa and her staff through that, just watching them. And getting that opportunity, and that has definitely motivated me this idea of journeying, and when I look at my friends in Gaza now and the ones who we were able to evacuate for higher purposes. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

And getting that opportunity, and that has definitely motivated me, this idea of journeying, and when I look at my friends in Gaza now and the ones who we were able to evacuate for higher purposes. Journeying with them through bombings. I'm getting messages: "I'm being, we're being bombed now." We're saying goodbye to one another on WhatsApp numerous, numerous, numerous times. And yet, we have these conversations sealed forever. We were there with each other, couldn't be there in person, but we journeyed, and I feel like some that value of journeying with someone staying with them can look so many different ways, but it's the idea that we're with them, we're committed. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

Either personal or professional growth by taking and journeying with them again. All right, so who are you? What made you who you are? Tell me about this resilience that I can see in you. Tell me more about how you, how you became such a great whatever and all right, let's go from there. Rather than focusing what you don't have or what you wish you had or what you need, it's you've got these things already. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

And again, I feel like I'm keep coming back to a similar concept, but it wasn't there, I didn't know these men and women's language. She had me sit. The nurses there had me sit with men and women, and they allowed me to hold their hand. And these were men and women who were on their last breaths. And share space with them. And even though we couldn't communicate with a language, I would talk to them in English. They probably didn't understand. I was crying. They were crying. The physical touch, how much that matters, the dignity. Of sitting with someone in their time of need. They don't need advice. They don't need all the things, just the journeying and the sitting. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

Code Excerpts: Empathy and Perspective-Taking

"I think my childhood has enabled me, number one, that I can empathize with different cultures" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

I think to answer the question of how that has affected me is, I think that I am probably more empathetic to cultural cues and I think that I'm more, I can more quickly establish someone's kind of motivations or bent or drive. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

I was able to glean the best of every, of every worldview and of every perspective, and that actually enabled me to love people better. Like I felt that I love people better because I could understand why they were suffering. I understood why they were breaking the law when those that were rule-based, they were like, no, they have to do this. But I understood from their perspective why they were doing this. So, it enabled me to even share the gospel more effectively, just because I knew what they were struggling with when it came to the gospel and why they were struggling. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

Experiencing multiple cultures is honestly the best thing that happened to me in my life. Honestly, you grow, you grow with a lot of preconceived notions, right? I would like to feel that my situation is very, very unique because I come from a very unique place, right. But like basically that's me. But just because historically

and culturally you have some enemies, for example, as countries and wars. You make assumptions about these people. And I think coming to the USA, especially going to college and then really, really like mingling with so many people from every single part of the world, I think it's a beautiful thing because then you really realize that we're all the same, and even if you actually go on a macro level like geopolitically. I think you can actually carry that experience to an organization. You can really find out that it's like people are people and like they all want the same thing. They're all good. And then you also have some people with bad tendencies as well. They have the same motivations that all they want to do is just have a good life. And they have nothing personal against anybody because of who they are. They just haven't been exposed, I think, and they just haven't been able to actually really understand the difference. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

I think taking time to ask questions, taking time to listen. I've learned giving people the benefit of the doubt because we can assume a lot of things from our own little position or perspective or experience, but until you ask them and talk to them, you will never know the truth from their perspective. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

I realized the value and I realized how hard it is to have those conversations, and sometimes people are not always open to that. But I know how valuable it is just to communicate. To communicate, to be open, to listen and not go in with judgment. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

Theme Description for Behavioral Cultural Intelligence

Behavioral CQ is the ability to operate appropriately for a broad spectrum of stations and exhibit culturally appropriate "words, tones, gestures, and facial expressions" (Ng et al., 2009, p. 515). A person who acts according to rules acceptable in a unique cultural setting and adjusts to dynamic environments operates at a high level of behavioral intelligence (Erez et al., 2013). Behavioral CQ includes dexterity in verbal and nonverbal communication, drilling down to gestures and facial expressions that are nuanced from culture to culture (Erez et al., 2013). The concept codes contained within the theme are included in Table 8 (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Table 8: Code Frequencies for Behavioral Cultural Intelligence

Concept code	Frequency
AI: Environmental awareness	2
AI: Collective interdependence	3
AI: Rapid integration skills	4

Concept code	Frequency
Language	10

Code Excerpts: AI Environmental Awareness

Coming from a small country that is always basically geographically and geopolitically, it's in a place where we have to be like always aware of our surroundings, the superpowers, because we don't have the leverage. Whereas in the United States, we have all the leverage. People will interview someone in America and they'll ask them like, so where, where is the country, Bolivia or whatever? And they don't know. Well, they shouldn't know. They wouldn't know, right? Why? Because America is a gravitational force and the whole world gravitates around it. I think coming up from a country where I need to know who is my enemy and make sure that they're also our friends because I can't even defend myself even if they know that they're enemies. So, you need to be like really political. You don't need to be diplomatic. You need to make sure that you kind of understand the leverage. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

So I'm hyper aware in situations and, for example, even to me as a leader, even body language, I can tell you how many times even on Zoom I see a smile or a smirk. I'll actually reach out to this person after that just to find out what's going on. It's nonverbal. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

Code Excerpts: Collective Interdependence

And I think the other thing, I think when you're coming up from a culture and really a place of struggle is that you really understand that you have to, you have to rely on people. So, for me, it's always very important always to kind of this kind of like a camaraderie. That you basically need to take care of people. So, I think for me as a leader, that's the only reason why honestly, I'm in leadership. Otherwise, I would much rather be just like doing a job of as an expert and not really managing people. But I do enjoy. I really like to take care of people. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

Different cultural differences like in, in the United States, the culture is very individualistic. Everybody knows that they don't have to depend on their neighbor, right? You just take care of it. You go hire someone, right? This has been changing with globalization. In Bulgaria, your neighbor was anything. You couldn't do anything without people because you had no resources. So, I think this sort of like a resource constraint really teaches you to tap into people and really understand how it's not just transactional between people. But it's more of

a long-term camaraderie that you need to create with people. I call it the favors economy. (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025)

"So as a leader, I definitely think that, kind of going back to this explanation about the neighbors, creating your tribe. I think it's just like really as a leader what motivates me is beyond transactional" (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025).

Code Excerpts: Rapid Integration Skills

"It's very easy for me to integrate into a multinational team" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

Capable of interacting with people from other cultures very, very easily and naturally, where some of our peers might be able to operate in a professional sense or a strictly individual sense that they're just gregarious people or outgoing people. But I think that I can get into a quick professional relationship with other personnel because I'm used to that sort of thing. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

I think that, that for me personally, it masks a lot of my introvertedness. I am by nature an introverted person and I would prefer just to be by myself or a small group of people, but I think that the concrete experience or the actual output is I typically work very well in, in a team and I'm, and I'm integrated into teams whether I'm in charge or just a member very quickly. (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025)

"From one place the norm for food, dress, vernacular is different than another place, and I think that I can integrate quickly because of those experiences" (Participant 2, personal communication, July 22, 2025).

Code Excerpts: Language

"And early on, I remember my parents just telling me that I needed to learn as many languages as possible" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

"I remember sitting in kindergarten and just marveling at the people around me speaking this different language, eating this different food and doing different activities (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025).

I think growing up once we moved to Vienna, my world opened up even more. First it was this new environment. New language, you become fluent. We were

in this small village and then that expands to this metropolitan city where we're now attending an international school where I could still continue my German. I got both degrees when I graduated, the Austrian diploma as well as the American one. But it just expanded that worldview even more, because now I was in this little microcosm of attendees of this school, students being from all over literally the world. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

But my dad really wanted our whole family to speak Hakka and not just Mandarin, because Mandarin is the standard language for all education, right? He did not want me just to learn Mandarin. He wanted us to learn Hakka because he felt that we needed to understand first our own culture and even regardless of where you are in the world, you're always, he always told me you're always going to look Asian, and so you need to know and understand your culture. And so that was a beautiful thing. My dad had definitely foresight because I know how difficult it is to maintain a language when you are not in your home country. And he really made a point. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

"So, then I started learning English and taking English as a foreign language at a kind of special school. So, I was already early on doing three languages. And because of that, I just naturally always enjoyed languages" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

"And so, I think that is part when I think about my growing-up years, that is part of my love for culture, my love for languages, and I'm able to see it, like it blends together" (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025).

I just loved hearing about different cultures and then hearing different languages. And I often would hear like Hakka Portuguese. Then I would watch movies in Brazil and all the movies are from Hollywood, so English. That was already like I was already constantly exposed to different languages, different cultures and my parents definitely were a big part of it. (Participant 1, personal communication, July 16, 2025)

So I definitely feel motivated by that. I served in Mother Teresa's Home of the Destitute and Dying when I was 19. I at that time thought I was called to India. Not long after I arrived, the Lord spoke very clearly that India was not the place and I pretty much broke down and did not want that to be the answer because I fell in love with it while I was there. But serving in her Home of the Destitute and Dying, it left a huge impact on motivation for me. I didn't know these men and women's language. She had me sit. The nurses there had me sit with men and women, and they allowed me to hold their hand. And these were men and

women who were on their last breaths. And share space with them. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

And even though we couldn't communicate with a language, I would talk to them in English. They probably didn't understand. I was crying. They were crying. The physical touch, how much that matters, the dignity. Of sitting with someone in their time of need. They don't need advice. They don't need all the things, just the journeying and the sitting. (Participant 3, personal communication, July 24, 2025)

"I know the language and the culture, but I also don't anymore" (Participant 4, personal communication, July 28, 2025).

Discussion

Empirical literature on ATCKs indicated that behaviors learned through experiences, signified by the ELT during developmental years, implicate the acquisition of CQ (Erez et al., 2013; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Selmer & Lauring, 2014). However, the literature lacked a connection between ELT and CQ in ACTKs as a professional advantage over mono-culturally raised peers in globalized leadership scenarios. The present research focused on gleaning lived experiences from ACTKs who work on leadership teams in multi-national organizations. This research is important because it synthesized theoretical constructs with lived experiences to examine why and how developmental events can confer professional advantages to extend empirical and practical literature.

As explained in the methods and procedures section, qualitative data were collected through interviews with four ATCKs who shared lived encounters, answering three deep-level questions:

1. How do you feel your developmental experiences from your childhood and adolescence contributed to your globalized identity and cross-cultural leadership skillsets?
2. How have concrete experiences and learning in formative years impacted your values, motivation, and perceived levels of cultural intelligence?
3. How does your upbringing as a TCK influence your ability to discern what is happening in dynamic cultural scenarios and act appropriately to resolve conflict with diverse team members in the workplace?

The interviews were followed by an analysis of the data to extract concept codes aligned with literature-based themes, cultivating empirical evidence to answer the following research question: Why does upbringing in a country or culture other than

the individual's passport add an advantage over peers raised only in their country of birth to leadership in globalized organizational leadership scenarios?

Answer to Research Question

RQ: Why does upbringing in a country or culture other than the individual's passport add an advantage over peers raised only in their country of birth to leadership in globalized organizational leadership scenarios?

The analysis of data resulted in 25 concept codes embedded in eight empirically grounded themes that illuminated the advantage of ACTKs in globalized leadership settings as a result of learning experiences in developmental years that generated the acquisition of cultural intelligence. Using the theoretical construct's elements as themes framed the high-frequency codes, which resulted in three skills all participants articulated as learned behaviors, cultivating cultural intelligence and professional advantages in globalized leadership scenarios that answer the research question:

Themes:

- Concrete experience
- Abstract conceptualization
- Reflective observation
- Active experimentation
- Metacognitive cultural intelligence
- Cognitive cultural intelligence
- Motivational cultural intelligence
- Behavioral cultural intelligence

Emergent skills:

- Observation
- Empathy
- Intuition

Concrete Experience

 The theme concrete experience helps answer the research question by highlighting how individuals raised in multiple cultural contexts accumulate diverse, tangible experiences during their formative years that others cannot replicate. These immediate, lived experiences across different cultural settings provide them with firsthand knowledge of varied social norms, communication styles, and problem-solving approaches. When leading global organizations, these concrete experiences enable more intuitive navigation of cross-cultural complexities and adaptation to diverse stakeholder

needs, giving them a practical advantage over peers whose experiential learning has been limited to a single cultural context (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Abstract Conceptualization

The theme of abstract conceptualization helps answer the research question by highlighting how individuals with cross-cultural upbringings develop enhanced reflective capabilities that become leadership assets. Through intentional reflection on their diverse cultural experiences, these individuals transform concrete experiences into symbolic understanding, enabling them to conceptualize leadership challenges from multiple perspectives. This reflective processing of cross-cultural experiences creates cognitive frameworks that allow global leaders to navigate complexity, interpret diverse scenarios, and develop more nuanced approaches to leadership in globalized contexts than peers without such varied cultural exposure (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Reflective Observation

Reflective observation helps answer the research question by illuminating how individuals with cross-cultural upbringings develop a heightened capacity for thoughtful processing of diverse experiences. This internal reflection allows them to transform childhood encounters with different cultural contexts into actionable leadership insights and approaches. Their ability to consciously process cultural differences through reflection creates a metacognitive advantage, enabling them to better understand varied perspectives, anticipate cultural challenges, and adapt their leadership style accordingly in globalized organizational settings (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Active Experimentation

The theme of active experimentation helps answer the research question because individuals with cross-cultural upbringings have had opportunities to actively experiment with different cultural behaviors, norms, and approaches in authentic contexts. This practical experience of testing, adapting, and refining behaviors across cultural boundaries develops a heightened ability to translate cultural understanding into effective leadership action in globalized organizations. Unlike peers raised only in their country of birth, these individuals have already practiced the behavioral flexibility required to operate across cultural divides, giving them a distinct advantage in implementing culturally appropriate leadership strategies in diverse organizational settings (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence

Metacognitive CQ directly addresses the leadership advantage gained through cross-cultural upbringing by enabling leaders to consciously process and adapt to diverse cultural contexts. Those raised across multiple cultures develop an enhanced capacity to plan for cultural differences, monitor their assumptions and behaviors during cross-cultural interactions, and revise their approaches based on accumulated experiences. This cognitive agility becomes a significant advantage in globalized leadership scenarios, as these individuals can anticipate cultural challenges, remain self-aware during complex multicultural encounters, and continuously refine their leadership approach; skills that are less developed in those exposed only to their birth culture (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Cognitive Cultural Intelligence

The theme of cognitive CQ contributes to answering the research question by illuminating how individuals raised across multiple cultures develop enhanced knowledge frameworks of diverse social, legal, and economic systems. This cross-cultural upbringing fosters an ability to anticipate and understand cultural differences in globalized organizational contexts, leading to more accurate expectations and fewer reactionary responses when navigating complex international leadership scenarios. Such cognitive advantages provide these individuals with superior cultural sense-making capabilities compared to peers raised exclusively in their birth country, positioning them to more effectively lead in globalized organizational environments (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Motivational Cultural Intelligence

Motivational CQ directly addresses the research question by highlighting how individuals raised across cultures develop a distinctive ability to navigate unfamiliar situations, a critical leadership advantage in global organizations. Their cross-cultural upbringing fostered stronger intrinsic motivation, building a desire to seek out cultural challenges and learning opportunities rather than avoiding them. This cultivated self-efficacy translates into greater confidence when leading diverse teams and managing complex international scenarios. Unlike peers raised in a single culture, these individuals have repeatedly practiced engaging with cultural differences, developing an internal drive for cultural exploration that becomes particularly valuable when leading in globalized organizational contexts where adaptive motivation is essential (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

Behavioral Cultural Intelligence

The theme of behavioral CQ directly addresses the research question by highlighting how individuals raised in multiple cultural contexts develop superior adaptability in communication and interpersonal behaviors. Those with cross-cultural upbringings naturally acquire the ability to modify their verbal and nonverbal expressions according to different cultural norms, giving them a distinct advantage in global leadership scenarios where such flexibility is crucial. This behavioral dexterity, developed through formative experiences across cultures, enables these leaders to connect authentically with diverse teams, navigate complex international interactions, and demonstrate appropriate cultural expressions that mono-cultural peers would need to consciously learn later in life (Intellectus Statistics, 2025).

In summary, the answer to the research question is that upbringing in a culture outside one's passport country cultivates cultural intelligence learned through experience. ATCKs possess the ability to empathize with others by using their ability to see themselves and others with an open mind. This competency is cultivated through concrete developmental experiences in community and school settings where the ATCK overcame a relational or cultural disadvantage by employing keen observation to discern before acting through reflective observation and active experimentation. Additionally, individual and spiritual experiences influence the development of cultural intelligence through abstract conceptualization that equips ATCKs to intuitively interpret what is taking place in a complex scenario at multiple levels simultaneously. These skills obtained in childhood are activated for success in leadership and management in diverse scenarios (Wolfe, 2024).

The answer to the research question confirms that living in a foreign culture during developmental years placed the learning environment in a live setting for ATCKs facing real problems generating metacognitive and cognitive intelligence. Conflict resolution is a strength developed through educational and relational opportunities that required them as children to mitigate disagreements and misunderstandings both as individuals and in collective circumstances. Motivational CQ proved to be developed through concrete experiences that fostered compassion, resulting in motivation to operationalize empathy in leadership. The ATCKs' ability to intuitively apply or withhold appropriate verbal and nonverbal responses based on an assessment of a situation, illustrated behavioral CQ. The skills developed became part of their core processes, making them intuitive versus something gleaned from corporate training (Wolfe, 2024).

Furthermore, the answer to the research question progresses with cultural influences from childhood, fostering diplomacy through verbal responses and nonverbal approaches to globalized leadership settings. ATCKs are capable of entering a context with observation as their initial action and employing relational connections through

empathy to diffuse conflict and reach equitable solutions in diverse work groups, reducing reactionary responses. Learning through experiences in developmental years cultivates core competencies in observation, empathy, and intuition, creating an advantage for ATCKs in globalized leadership settings (Wolfe, 2024).

Contribution to Scholarly Literature

The literature revealed a connection converging in ATCKs between the ELT and CQ. Learning experiences are intentionally cultivated while engaging participants to actively develop intellectually and emotionally (Erez et al., 2013). When ELT is applied to cultural aptitude, the formation of CQ is affirmed. CQ carries capacities for learning that enhance the translation of expatriate vocational experiences into desired learning outcomes through ELT functions of "experiencing, reflecting, observing, and experimenting" (Ng et al., 2009, p. 514). The multicultural experiences of ACTKs are linked to the development of CQ, equipping them to handle adjustment and integration in host cultures with keen awareness, a skill unnatural in mono-cultural adults (Selmer & Lauring, 2014). The dynamic environment of multinational organizations is due to heterogeneous cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and expectations (Erez et al., 2013), which necessitate leaders to operate with a high level of CQ. ATCKs have the advantage to succeed, even lead, in multi-cultural and diverse industries when learned experiences are transformed into high levels of cultural intelligence, giving them a potential advantage over mono-cultural peers.

There is a deficit of empirical evidence available about why and how ATCKs, those who have spent a portion or all of their childhood in a country other than their passport (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), who hold the potential to advantage in this arena, could thrive as set apart from peers raised in a mono-cultural setting. A gap exists in using ELT to compare the acquisition of CQ post-childhood from those raised solely in their passport country and those who develop CQ over time through adolescence, immersed in a foreign context. The present research indicated three thematic foci that add value to the empirical literature: observation, empathy, and intuition.

Adding to the ELT concepts, this study revealed that the four phases of ELT—experiencing, reflecting, observing, and experimenting (Ng et al., 2009)—take place in a diverse, even adverse environment. The interactions and experiences between people and environments launch learning. For ACTKs, these occur in culturally complex atmospheres, cultivating reflection and observation that includes concepts, worldviews, values, sights, smells, and sounds abstract to those raised in a mono-cultural setting. Participants in this investigation articulated as adults that the cycle of experiencing, reflecting, observing, and experimenting is active, almost organic, as they apply the core processes they gained through childhood to professional scenarios. The theoretical elements of the ELT were confirmed through participant testimonies. The unique value

is that the ATCKs' approaches consistently included keen observation skills, generous empathy, and natural intuition to successfully problem-solve, mitigate conflict, and lead in diverse scenarios versus their mono-cultural counterparts.

Additionally, CQ can be learned (Ng et al., 2009). CQ is the ability to function and manage culturally diverse scenarios effectively (Ng et al., 2009); however, the learning platform influences the lifespan of the skillsets. Obtaining CQ in developmental years anchors these elements in the intellectual and emotional core processes of thought and action (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The key difference is that ATCKs learn CQ in their developmental years through lived experiences in cultures outside their passport country.

Moreover, contributions to the literature on the four aspects of CQ—metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral—were realized. Metacognitive CQ is the ability to be consciously aware during intercultural experiences, with the mental capacity to understand diverse situations while maintaining a sound mind and sober actions (Ng et al., 2009). Participants shared examples from developmental years where metacognitive CQ was obtained through experiences having to navigate culturally complex scenarios. Instances where active reflection and evaluation, a hallmark of metacognitive CQ, were cultivated to take place before, during, and after instances due to the level of uncertainty and the need to survive situations from childhood. Mental agility in ATCKs was confirmed as an acquired skill through testimonies of observation and intuition assisting in problem-solving and diplomacy in corporate settings. What differentiates ATCKs is that metacognitive CQ flowed in a natural manner out of who they are (core processes) versus an applied skill from a training module.

Cognitive CQ fosters knowledge of social, legal, and economic systems diversity, producing adequate expectations and reduced reactionary responses (Ng et al., 2009). People with cognitive CQ can appropriately understand, anticipate, compare, and contrast cross-cultural circumstances (Ng et al., 2009). The present research affirmed the scope and application of cognitive CQ in ATCKs as immediate, innate responses to culturally complex and problem-wrought scenarios. Consistently, the ATCKs interviewed expressed situations where they were called upon to mitigate conflict and interpret miscommunication because their value of empathy caused them to operate with the ability to discern situations and read people with equity and honesty. The ATCKs' reduced reactionary responses to adverse situations or stress inoculation elevated them in the eyes of their peers and employers as persons able to constructively mitigate conflict and reach holistic compromise.

Furthermore, motivational CQ is the ability to cope with dynamic, unfamiliar situations by concentrating on what can be learned from observed differences, encompassing internal and external components (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016; Ng et al., 2009).

Interviewees expressed strong internal motivation anchored to family values and spiritual experiences due to the changing nature of their external circumstances. Internal values grounded in family standards and religion were nurtured over time to become more important than external motivators because they were the only consistent value factor. Although the literature presents internal and external motivation as equal parts of motivational CQ, participants in this study expressed their motivation almost exclusively as internal. The ability to thrive in alien situations was sourced from central values established through developmental experiences, not the desire to meet a corporate goal or compensation.

Operating appropriately within a broad spectrum of situations through verbal and nonverbal actions is behavioral CQ (Ng et al., 2009). High levels of behavioral CQ cause individuals to understand and, therefore, act with acceptable rules in unique cultural settings, including finite elements such as verbal tone, gestures, and facial expressions (Erez et al., 2013). Behavioral CQ acquired in childhood through finding diplomatic solutions for renegade peers from a completely different culture can become the intuitive ability to reason with terrorist border agents to transport aid into crises. Interpreting for family members from a first language to a third language through immigration can cultivate empathy to include all participants in a given scenario. Allowing individuals to operate in the values inherent to a culture is developed through observing conflict when one culture asserts its dominance, inappropriately hindering the ability to collaborate. Behavioral CQ became intuitive because it was learned through developmental experiences, producing strategic skillsets in a global leadership position.

The professional advantage for ACTKs that ELT reveals is that lived experiences cultivate CQ in their core processes, meaning it is not just a skill they have, it is a part of who they are. Cognitive and emotional intelligence source out of diverse developmental experiences, advantaging ATCKs in situations requiring conflict resolution, high understanding, diversity management, and cultural dexterity. The interviewees each testified to CQ as a result of developmental experiences they had reflected upon and experimented with, applying principles to present leadership settings. The added value to the empirical literature holds implications for practical application unique to diverse organizational leadership.

Contribution to Practitioner Literature

The present investigation affirmed and extended the empirical literature on ELT and CQ for the ATCK demographic. Likewise, practitioner literature asserts that CQ can be learned through tailored methods and applied across vocations (Erez et al., 2013; Thomas & Inkson, 2017). The demographic focus of this study shows that what would take a significant investment of resources into a mono-cultural employee (Thomas &

Inkson, 2017), exists organically through experiential learning in ATCKs. The ATCK advantage is that observation, empathy, and intuition are skillsets of the individual's core processes (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) and, therefore, approach a vocation or situation with innate competencies, which requires less training and resource investment.

According to Winston (2018), competence results in higher job performance. The premise of Thomas and Inkson (2017) is that education can train an individual to develop CQ proficiency, as affirmed by Erez et al. (2013). The present research highlights that ATCKs, as practitioners, come to the job with cultural intelligence as a core process. ATCKs enter a corporate scenario equipped to manage diversity due to their innate competencies to observe, empathize, and act with intuition in culturally complex situations. Communication, for example, is a barrier all organizations must overcome (Thomas & Inkson, 2017). From this study emerged themes solidifying the communication competency that ATCKs develop through experiential learning, assisting them as adults to interpret, mitigate conflict, and discern, both verbally and nonverbally, what is taking place in a challenging situation.

Furthermore, connected to talent acquisition and ongoing professional development, ATCKs have potential for higher job performance due to their experience and aptitude to successfully navigate dynamic situations with diverse groups. Cross-cultural managers with high CQ operate with greater adaptability and functionality in unfamiliar environments (Vlajčić et al., 2019). Training for mono-cultural colleagues who do not yet possess CQ would not be needed, at least not at the same origin point. Therefore, organizations could save economically by employing ATCKs who need less education in the areas related to CQ and diversity management. Additionally, fostering an inclusive corporate culture cannot be instituted through training alone; training is not designed to carry the weight of culture change (Moodian, 2009). Employing individuals with CQ competencies could infuse the organizational culture with operational empathy and diplomacy, two values central to an inclusive work environment capable of valuing associates for unique skillsets and managing diversity (Mor Barak, 2016). There is a potential economic advantage for globalized organizations to employ ATCKs.

Limitations of this Study

Limitations of the present research surface in the sampling method. Convenience sampling was employed for accessibility and availability; therefore, three participants were known personally to me, and one was connected through a colleague (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). Although no appearance of bias was revealed in the answers provided by interviewees, additional research could expand this study to ATCKs that are not directly associated with the investigator.

Additionally, participants' faith foundation in formative years was varied, including Confucian Buddhism, Orthodoxy, and Western Christianity. Further study could intentionally gather purposeful participants who adhered to or were intimately influenced by other world religions in developmental years. Data collected on the impact of spiritual experiences from a diversity of religious worldviews could bolster the depth and generalizability of this study (Miles et al., 2020).

Recommendations to Extend the Literature

Theory

The current literature on the ELT covers extensively intellectual and emotional aspects of leading (Erez et al., 2013). However, from the present qualitative research, there emerged testimonies of the influence of spiritual experiences in developmental years. Participants shared how their various faith backgrounds shaped their developmental experiences and, subsequently, their motives, values, and ability to succeed professionally in culturally dynamic situations. There is a limited amount of study on spiritual experiences as a direct mechanism of experiential learning and their impact on adult behavior. The work of Veselský et al. (2013) discovered a connection; however, the project did not produce a theoretical measurement or practitioner applications for organizational leadership. Additional research on experiential learning could include the construct of spiritual experiences as a unique element of the ELT. Investigations could seek to discover how spiritual experiences in developmental years impact adult CQ acumen and leadership competencies for ATCKs.

Practice

Although practitioner literature affirmed the purpose and provided methods of why and how to provide training for individuals to obtain CQ (Thomas & Inkson, 2017), there is a gap in the practitioner literature that includes individuals who arrive with global competencies, versus mono-cultural employees who begin a role with less developed skillsets in this genre. To extend resources on the value of ATCKs in diverse leadership scenarios, the question can be posed: If this demographic exists, how are they being equipped and engaged to actualize into leadership roles in a globalized organizational setting? Further investigation could be conducted to obtain empirical data to discover if ATCKs have a professional advantage in diversity management. Studies could focus on the tangible elements that support the success of ATCKs in dynamic environments and be synthesized into principles of hiring and professional development practices. A possible result is a framework of competencies employers can source to obtain individuals capable of managing diversity and cultivating an inclusive corporate culture from the point of hire. An outcome could be an increased pace of corporate culture change toward workforce global competency if an organization does

not have to rely on training alone, but rather intentionally employs individuals skilled in the areas necessary to successfully manage diversity.

Conclusion

This investigation intended to extend the current literature by utilizing the ELT with the concepts of CQ with ATCKs to answer the research question: Why does upbringing in a country or culture other than the individual's passport add an advantage over peers raised only in their country of birth to leadership in globalized organizational leadership scenarios? Experiential learning has proven to cultivate competencies that become part of an individual's core processes (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The lived experiences of the participants in this study affirmed the theoretical validity of the ELT and the constructs of CQ as aspects of professional acumen. Twenty-five concept codes were identified and distilled into eight literature-based themes. The content codes supported the themes, which resulted in three skills: observation, empathy, and intuition. For ATCKs, the skillsets developed advantage them ahead of their mono-culturally raised peers to lead in culturally dynamic organizations. Further research could extend the theoretical literature by investigating aspects of spiritual learning and practitioner literature by developing frameworks for organizations to intentionally employ ATCKs toward an inclusive culture and keen aptitude to manage diversity.

About the Author

Rev. Elizabeth Wolfe is a PhD candidate in organizational leadership through Regent University's School of Business and Leadership with a concentration in entrepreneurial leadership. Elizabeth's projected completion date is May 2026. Elizabeth has worked as a people leader of diverse work teams for 20 years in four countries on three continents in not-for-profit organizations, organizational development, and human resources. Elizabeth recently founded the Wolfe Leadership Group consulting firm. Additionally, Elizabeth has served as an adjunct professor at Evangel University since 2022 and has been ordained since 2012. Elizabeth's research interests include design thinking, entrepreneurialism, emerging contexts, globalization, organizational development, and human resources.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Rev. Elizabeth Wolfe, 2137 S. Poseyville Rd, Midland, MI 48640; www.linkedin.com/in/elizabethswolfe; Email: wolfee@evangel.edu

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