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Teaching and Learning Cultural Metacognition in Marketing and Sales Education

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ABSTRACT

Thinking about cultural assumptions, referred to as cultural metacognition, can help increase awareness, build trust, and create successful marketing and sales outcomes. The role of cultural metacognition in marketing and sales education helps students build a cultural metacognition knowledge base and promotes appreciation of its importance and effect on business enhancement. The context of this article will help amplify knowledge, ideas, and skills necessary to connect various issues of teaching and learning cultural metacognition. This article will facilitate business educators' teaching practices that foster learning cultural metacognition and its effects on marketing and sales. The ultimate goal is to help elevate teaching, learning, and assessment practices related to the topic of cultural metacognition in marketing and sales education.

KEYWORDS

Classroom Assessment Tools, Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Cultural Knowledge, International Business

INTRODUCTION

Metacognition is the knowledge about and regulation of cognition, comprising the processes of monitoring and adjusting thoughts and strategies as one learns new skills (Flavell, 1979; Triandis, 1995). Metacognition is a vital part of the four components that make up Cultural Intelligence (CQ) (*motivational, cognitive*, *metacognitive*, and *behavioral CQ*) which is based upon Sternberg's multiple loci of intelligences (Ang, Van Dyne, & Tan, 2011) and can be referred to as *cultural metacognition*. Specifically, cultural metacognition is thinking about cultural assumptions, and helps increase awareness and build trust in cross-cultural relationships. It is an affective skill in reflecting on cultural assumptions, in preparation for, adaptation to, and learning from intercultural interactions (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006; Klafehn, Banerjee, & Chiu, 2008; Thomas, 2006).

Cultural metacognition is important because people come from many different backgrounds and societal groups, with fundamental differences in worldviews, ethical standards, and social structure. Employees and stakeholders are completely international, and business decision-making becomes more complex as it applies to employees and stakeholders of different cultures. A complete knowledge base of cultural metacognition is essential for business managers to appreciate the importance of different cultures, and to recognize their own cultural uniqueness and the affect it has on business enhancement (Morris, 2012).

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According to Morris (2012), gaining awareness of personal assumptions can build trust and take a team beyond cooperating on a task, to true creative collaboration. Cultural metacognition in marketing and sales is a vital element in the 21st century. In terms of educational and practical implications, future business success requires training and harnessing metacognitive habits among students and managers (Mor, Morris & Joh, 2013).

BACKGROUND

In his seminal work, Hart (1965) talked about the "feeling-of-knowing" experience linked to long-term memory, which forged the way for further studies focused on metacognition. Flavell (1976,1979, 1987) used the term metacognition to present a conceptual model of cognitive monitoring. This encouraged educational researchers to develop interventions that would increase cognitive monitoring, on the premise that cognitive monitoring would lead to better learning. Flavell's model identified metacognition as one's self-knowledge about cognition (metacognitive knowledge) and regulation of cognition (metacognitive regulation), or strategies for doing so. Flavell felt that everyone has the ability to monitor, track, evaluate, and change their thinking and learning processes.

Chua, Morris, and Mor (2012) gathered from research that cultural metacognition is a skill that enables individuals to reflect on "cultural assumptions in order to prepare for, adapt to, and learn from intercultural interactions" (p. 116). More than just simply knowing about culture, it includes the skill of understanding and collaborating knowledge. It involves the skills of monitoring, evaluating, and coordinating cognitive processes that help advance business practices.

Intercultural effectiveness requires forging close working relationships with people from various cultural backgrounds (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). Interactions with people from various cultures expose students and colleagues to ideas and angles that add new insights and diversity (Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012). "The habit and skill of thinking about one's own and other's culturally based assumptions presumably enables individuals to communicate better, to put people at ease, and to avoid misunderstandings and tensions" (Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2102, p. 117). Conversely, the failure of managers from various cultures and countries to work effectively with one another can lead to business-structure demise (Hagel & Brown, 2005).

MAIN FOCUS OF THE ARTICLE

The context of this article will help to amplify ideas necessary to connect issues of teaching, learning and assessing students' cultural metacognition for cross-cultural environments. The ultimate goal for educators is to enable students to move their cognitive knowledge to a higher level of metacognition, where they are active, self-monitoring, and goal-directed, and embrace an internal locus of control over their own learning.

The three basic framework strategies for fostering metacognition are: connecting new information to former and current knowledge; selecting deliberate thinking strategies; and planning, monitoring, and evaluating the process (Dirkes, 1985).

One way to assess students' understanding of cultural metacognition is by using Classroom Assessment Tools (CATs). CATs are ungraded activities that help educators assess what was taught. CATs help students by increasing their ability to think critically about what was being taught. CATs help educators "…obtain useful feedback on what, how much, and how well their students are learning" (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 3).

Following are some practical tools/strategies that can inform cultural metacognition.

Web-Based Platforms

Web-based platform tools are available in the marketplace which can assist users with how to test their assumptions about a culture in which they may not be competent. These platforms helps users analyze cultural preferences to improve cross-cultural collaboration. One example is the Cultural Navigator (see www.culturalnavigator.com).

Mentoring

Mor, Morris, and Joh (2013) suggest that teachers consider assigning students who score higher on cultural metacognition negotiate or work on class assignments with students who score low on cultural metacognition competencies. This method is applicable in the field as well where managers well embedded in metacognitive habits could assist those with less metacognition competencies.

Modeling

Modeling is an effective way to learn. Teachers and business leaders play vital roles with both the learner and the learning environment. The classroom and the field afford the opportunity for educators and leaders to model cultural metacognition skills, which can have a significant impact on those being taught.

Feedback

Mor, Morris, and Joh (2013) recommend the use of performance feedback as a way to develop awareness and planning habits. This could help show students where their metacognitive strategies might benefit from more training or harnessing. Lane (2007) teaches techniques for adapting the behaviors of virtual humans to promote cultural learning, as well as explicit approaches to feedback. These techniques help the learner recognize cultural difference and improve their ability to self-assess in an interpersonal context. High-fidelity simulations create realistic portrayals of different cultures in terms of architecture, dress, sounds, art, and even smells. According to Lane (2007), this can promote a learner's sense of immersion, and provide a foundation for identifying *objective* cultural differences.

Further, Lane details the use of *experience manipulation*, a technique that simulates an event or situation that promotes learning. This occurs through computer technologies that simulate real-world phenomena. Implicit feedback about oral and gestural reactions of virtual humans is solicited, so that participants can recognize any cultural errors, and experience accentuating positive and laudatory responses to correct user actions. Explicit feedback can also be helpful, where a pedagogical agent explains the cultural differences in play during specific interactions or warns against risks. Further details about experience manipulation can also be found in Lane and Johnson (2008), and Wray, Lane, Stensrud, Core, Hamel, and Forbell (2009).

Schemas

Schemas (knowledge structures) are sets of propositions or mental constructs that create generalizations and expectations about categories of objects, places, events, activities, and people. According to Earley and Peterson (2004), metacognition is critical for developing shared schemas. Research has shown that when certain schemas are applied in an intercultural-communication context, it could cause misunderstandings in the process. From implicit schema, explanations are derived for contradictory behavior to go with our schemas (e.g., if a professor is late, students might think some emergency arose; but, if the professor is consistently late, then students may decide he is an inadequate professor). One way of thinking about schemas is by working in intercultural teams where participants can learn, assess, and strategize.

Field-Based Learning

Another practical strategy to learn and practice cultural metacognition is though field training. Field training helps promote lived experiences that not only foster opportunities for higher levels of competencies, but also opportunities to foster higher order thinking.

Formative Assessments

Research has shown that formative assessment helps improve student metacognition and reflection (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Cizek, 2010). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) groups formative assessments into four types: observations, conversations, student self-evaluations, and artifacts of learning (NCTE, 2013). Specific tools and strategies of formative assessments include surveys, interviews, and conferences, as well as field notes in which teachers record descriptions of students' classroom interactions. Student self-evaluations are important components of formative assessment and metacognition, as they provide opportunities to reflect on goal progress. Artifacts of formative assessment are helpful for teachers, because they create opportunities to review data about individual students or groups of students, to support planning future learning experiences. For example, teachers may collect a variety of sources of information on a single learner (e.g. case study), in order to identify patterns of understanding for further analysis and learning (Pinchok & Brandt, 2009).

Building Respect

Being perceived as uncaring, whether overtly or indirectly through tone of voice or body language, can cost respect. In a qualitative study with youth, Price-Mitchell (2010) found that real-world service interactions with people who are suffering led to overcoming interpersonal challenges and transformational development of initiative, purpose, and civic identity. Meditation also increases compassionate response to others who are suffering (Condon, Desbordes, Miller, & DeSteno, 2013).

To fill the gap between theoretical and practical implications, educators can help their students understand more about respect for others by assigning them projects that integrate tasks that involve helping others in need, through charitable contribution or research. In fulfilling this task, students write about and discuss cultural awareness and the biases these experiences may have revealed.

Building on the notion that having conversations with strangers can promote rapport (Drolet & Morris, 2000), educators can ask students to have a personal conversation about the feelings they have in common with others they do not know.

Building Trustworthiness

The creative potential of cross-cultural interaction flows through trust (Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012). The sharing of new ideas requires trust and the confidence to rely on others (McAllister, 1995). Those with higher levels of cultural metacognition are more likely to develop trust in their intercultural interactions and relationships (Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012). Trust is a crucial factor for team performance. Without trust, team members are unlikely to voice their opinions, ask questions, or present ideas. In addition, without trust, team members are less likely to display their feelings or help others (Erdem, Ozen, & Atsan, 2003) All these aspects are crucial in co-creation of business networks and the building of high-performing teams (Hakanen & Soudunsaari, 2012). Chua, Morris, and Mor's (2012) research suggests that the sharing of new ideas depends greatly on true feelings and concern for one another (affect-based trust), not merely cognitive-based trust.

In terms of practice, Price-Mitchell (2010) suggests integrating five values (responsibility, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, and honesty) into the curriculum, and helping students use the vocabulary to discuss a variety of historical topics and current events. As a tool for teaching, since dishonesty and disrespect flourish in civil society, educators could ask students to find examples of how individuals stood up for their beliefs and values in ways that made a difference for themselves, or for the world.

This could help students think about others' experiences as well as their own assumptions, and to share with each other and learn from one another in the process.

Hakanen and Soudunsaari (2012) say:

Business partners do not commit fully to business network development without trust, both at the personal and business-concept levels. Enhancing trust needs a community of enrichment and regular interaction between all partners. Also, value creation and shared learning could be increased if high-trust relations are built. One of the key ingredients for better communication is genuine listening and respect for other team members' ideas. This study has also shown that fact-based communication alone does not build personal relations. Trust takes time to develop, but without conscious actions like one-on-one meetings with different partners and team-building exercises, the probability for success decreases. (p. 40)

Integrative models suggest that coaching designed to cultivate affectual and personal connections can be valuable early in a team's work together (Hackman & Wageman, 2005). Team-building training helps instill those affective bonds that are necessary to help build unpretentious relationships (Moreland & Myaskovsky, 2000).

Building Responsibility

Organizational ethics are not primarily driven by policies and procedures, but by the actions of leaders (Porter, 2014). Building social responsibility can help foster cultural metacognition. For example, teaching tasks that enable responsibility and propriety can foster meaningful relationships. This falls under the learning principle that one's actions affect others. Teaching students how to monitor or think about their actions can help foster metacognition in a positive direction. For instance, educators can provide students with various scenarios that can help them see how actions affect others.

Scenario example: Several multicultural participants hold a business meeting in which all favor setting a mutual agenda. Due to language and cultural barriers, one participant in particular is struggling to keep up and continually asks for clarification. One annoyed colleague begins to complain about repeated interruptions. The colleague's tone is rash and unfriendly.

Questions to consider:

1. How do you think this makes the person who is struggling and needful of clarifications feel?
2. What effect might the response of this colleague produce on the other participants?
3. How could this affect the outcomes of the business agenda?
4. What other options could be considered in dealing with this scenario?
5. What would be the responsible way to handle this situation?

Building Fairness

The Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education (2006) has developed an exercise that educators can use, titled "Creating Character: Visual History Lessons on Character Education." The project is designed to help students develop an understanding of the concepts of justice and fairness, working from visual-history testimonies. Students are asked to explore their own viewpoints regarding justice, and to identify steps they can take to promote justice and fairness. This educational task helps to promote higher levels of metacognition skills. Students are asked to complete the following tasks and corresponding questions:

1. Choose six student volunteers to participate in an experiential activity. Explain to the rest of the class that during this activity, they will be observing and recording the reactions of the volunteering participants;

2. Seat the six volunteers at the front of the room, facing the class. Explain to the volunteers that they are participating in a quiz show and that students who answer questions correctly will be rewarded;
3. Prior to beginning the questioning, secretly identify one or two participants against whom you will actively discriminate during the activity. This discrimination may be based on either a real difference (eye color, hair color, left-handedness, etc.) or it may be a random choice;
4. Begin asking the six volunteers relatively easy questions. These questions can be based on other lessons in this resource, on material that the class has previously covered, on current events, or on easy topics of student interest. Reward students who correctly answer the questions with something tangible, such as candy, stickers, stars, pens, or extra credit points. Do not acknowledge the responses from the student(s) who you have decided to actively discriminate against;
5. Continue the questioning process for approximately three to five minutes;
6. Once the activity has concluded, instruct all students, participants, and observers alike to silently reflect upon and write about this experience. Make sure students address the following: What exactly happened during this activity? What do you think was actually happening? What were the reactions of the participants during the activity? At what point did it become evident that certain participants were being treated unfairly? What were their general feelings about the activity? (p. 1)

Building Honesty

There tends to be a lack of realism and truth telling in interactions at work. Often people are forced to say what they think others want to hear, rather than what they believe to be true. As a result, workers don't become real in their expectations, thinking, and interactions. After a while, no one asks for opinions and thoughts because they know they aren't getting the truth. They basically give up.

When this happens within an organization, attempts at achieving "engagement" ends up being nothing more than a charade. In particular, if people don't think their leaders are being honest, they are not going to trust them, and if they don't trust them, decision making, communications, relationships, and results are affected. And the same happens on the flipside, if leaders just think their people are telling them what they want to hear, then they'll stop asking; clearly not a great scenario (Root White Paper, 2017).

One pedagogy that can be used to teach honesty is to illustrate a work culture that can actually point out what is not honest.

Questions for students consider:

1. Why do you believe there is a lack of realism and truth telling in interactions at work?
2. How can building honesty improve cross-cultural relationship building?
3. How can leaders model honesty?
4. What are the benefits of transparency?
5. What are the risks of transparency?
6. What are some ways to break through the barriers that block honesty?

Monitoring

Teaching students to monitor their cognitive processes is an important step toward building cultural metacognition practice. There are several ways to enhance students' monitoring techniques.

Monitoring involves continually checking for understanding. In terms of practice, educators can teach students to self-monitor their cultural understanding by reflection that includes looking at biases, awareness, sensitivities, inclusiveness, and relationship to business outcomes.

Educators should start by introducing self-awareness and self-monitoring skills. Students and educators should discuss key strategies for learning how to self-monitor. These sessions can include group activities designed to help students think about these new skills and apply them in practical ways.

For example, after initial sessions designed to teach self-monitoring skills, students could participate in staged groups that incorporate various cultural scenarios. One student could be staged as someone from a majority culture, and then interact with others who portray persons from a minority culture. After a few rounds of interactions, the students can report back their experiences and how the use of self-monitoring was applicable in the scenarios.

Another skill is monitoring one's own macroaggressions and microaffirmations. Microaggressions are small events or subtle acts of disrespect, which are often hard to prove, sometimes covert, and often unintentional, but which may lead to the perception of discrimination or harassment (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Microaffirmations are micromessages that convey inclusion, respect, trust, and genuine willingness to see others succeed (Rowe, 2008). Microaffirmations may lead to a more productive and efficient work environment, where all members feel valued and enjoy work. Research also shows that these "small" messages have power for insiders and outsiders (Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014). For example, when a person with higher status acknowledges someone at a meeting, that acknowledgement influences others to also think more highly of that acknowledged person.

Evaluating

It is important that students evaluate the cultural or personal differences that may be enhancing or limiting their potential to interact in a multicultural world. Getting an accurate picture requires gauging cognitive, relational, and behavioral differences, along various dimensions where cultural gaps are most common, and to assess in those areas. The 20-item, four factor *Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)* was developed to test and validate Earley and Ang's (2003) conceptualization of CQ. The CQS measures the four primary factors which represent CQ capabilities (Drive, Knowledge, Strategy, and Action CQ) (Van Dyne, Ang, & Koh, 2008). The CQS possesses good metric properties that has both applied and empirical potential (Van Dyne, Ang, & Koh, 2008).

There are several cultural awareness self-assessment forms available that educators could introduce to their students. These assessments can help provide a starting point for students to build a more comprehensive evaluation of themselves, as it relates to how they think about cross-cultural situations. *The Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Form 3* is free for public access and is a good tool to help broaden awareness.

The *Cultural Competence Checklist: Personal Reflection* is a tool developed by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association to heighten awareness of how professionals view clients/patients from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) populations (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2010).

Another way to evaluate awareness is by using the *Implicit Association Tests* (IAT) (see https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html). Implicit biases are those we carry without awareness or conscious direction. These tests have documented existence of bias on a range of dimensions of diversity (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, age, skin tone, sexual orientation) and in a range of cultures/contexts. These tests measure and compare response times to identify unstated biases, a great way to increase awareness. The underlying theory is that we will respond more accurately and quickly to associations that fit with our own implicit social cognitions—that is, those acquired associations that are largely involuntary (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). A comprehensive toolkit developed by the American Bar Association, to teach practical ways of dealing with implicit bias, could be an excellent tool for educators to adapt (see Marmer, Ridgeway, Sherman, Bass, & Epps, n.d.).

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research could focus on the human ability to monitor, track, evaluate, and change one's thinking and learning processes, as it relates to cross-cultural relationships. Both qualitative and quantitative research will help advance our knowledge of cultural metacognition.

As discussed, research on metacognition in general is fairly rich; however, specific research dedicated to cultural metacognition is evolving. Findings from research in educational and cognitive psychology show that metacognition exerts substantial influence on individual performance. The majority of this research examines metacognitive skill as it applies to academic settings; however, studies of other contexts, such as cross-cultural settings, are needed. Vich (2015) recommends that researchers extend their examination of individual effects to the effects in working-group relationships.

Given earlier findings, Mor, Morris, and Joh (2013) hypothesize that cultural perspective taking (i.e., considering how another's cultural background shapes behavior in a given context) facilitates intercultural coordination and cooperation, Manipulation that boosts cultural perspective taking would especially benefit individuals who score low in dispositional cultural metacognition. Future research along these lines could examine the cultural-metacognition effects of assigning students scoring higher on cultural metacognition to negotiate or work on class assignments with students scoring low on cultural metacognition. Better understanding of cultural perspective taking calls for additional research, exploring the ability to accurately detect culture-specific congruent or incongruent norms, which may require the development of metacognitive habits in tandem with foreign cultural knowledge (cognitive CQ).

More research is needed to expand on the theory that links cultural diversity with creativity, as findings suggest that conditions that allow collaboration of different cultures help increase creativity (Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012). Finding out what dynamics in teamwork suggest effective intercultural creative collaboration requires more research with multicultural teams. Expanding organizational research with diverse social and communicative networks, and considering what innovations are needed to advance business, are recommended.

Narrative research can be effective in determining communication expectations. Research built on narrative works by Gertsen and Søderberg (2011) could enable further study of how to adjust and learn during communication across cultures, to build mutual understanding, respect, and trust that could advance business practice.

Research on the role of affect is also needed, as this is the high-order taxonomy most closely related to metacognition. Cultural metacognition is associated with affective closeness and creative collaboration in intercultural relationships. However, we must learn more about those with low cultural metacognition who often rely on pejorative stereotypes about cultural out-groups, and do research on what interventions would be best—in other words, how to build on the work of Chua, Morris, and Mor (2012), who found that individuals' perceptions of colleagues' reliability and competence probably do not hinge as much on the quality of their interactions, as they do on their affective feelings toward their colleagues. Finally, intervention research is needed to find out how to build affect among those involved in cross-cultural business.

CONCLUSION

Cultural metacognition in cross-cultural business education is a vital element in the 21st century. A complete knowledge base of cultural metacognition is essential for students and business managers to appreciate the importance of different cultures, and to be aware of their own cultural uniqueness and the affect it has on business enhancement. Cultural metacognition involves monitoring, evaluating, and coordinating cognitive processes that help advance cross-cultural business practices. For managers, intercultural effectiveness requires forging close working relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds.

This article is unique in providing the reader with a new pedagogy to help facilitate business teaching practices, through practical strategies and educational tasks that will foster learning cultural metacognition and how it affects cross-cultural business practice. Bridging the gap between theory and practice, it elevates readers' teaching, learning practices, and research related to the topic of cultural metacognition in cross-cultural marketing and sales education.

Cultural metacognition builds on the fundamental values of higher-order academic integrity (e.g., responsibility, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, and honesty). Learning these values in practical ways fosters cultural metacognition knowledge base development and implementation. Finally, educational and practical implications, of training and harnessing cultural metacognitive habits among students are vital for success.

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