

# Benefits of cultural intelligence are reflected in work performance

November 4 2014, by Robert Mitchell

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Cultural intelligence requires four capabilities: motivation, drive, strategy, and action, said David Livermore, president of the Cultural Intelligence Center. Livermore was the featured speaker in the first Diversity Dialogue lecture this year. Credit: Jon Chase/Harvard Staff Photographer

A diverse workforce, whose members have developed their cultural intelligence, is a more productive workforce—and a diverse team with high cultural intelligence will outperform homogeneous teams, according to David Livermore, president of the Cultural Intelligence Center.

Livermore, the author of several books on cultural intelligence, including "Leading with Cultural Intelligence," was the featured speaker at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences' (FAS) Diversity Dialogue, "Cultural Intelligence: Why Higher Ed Needs It." He defined cultural intelligence as "the gift of effectively interacting and working with people from diverse cultures." A person with high cultural intelligence is one who "can effectively adapt to various multicultural situations," he said.

Livermore said that understanding other cultures determines effectiveness in the workplace, influences how conflicts are handled, and shapes the future. While basic social skills and respect for other cultures can be enough, cultural intelligence is especially important in stressful situations. Without it, mutual distrust can set in, language barriers can grow more divisive, and different people in the group may bring disparate approaches to conflict, he said.

Cultural intelligence requires four capabilities, Livermore said: motivation, drive, strategy, and action. A motivated person must have an interest in cross-cultural differences, and the drive to understand them. He or she must then develop a strategy that acknowledges cross-cultural situations, and plan how best to address the differences. Finally, while adaptability is required to be effective, it is equally important to know when to adapt and when not to, Livermore explained.

Livermore cautioned that cultural intelligence is not innate, but a developmental skill that comes with coaching, training, and dialogues. With interest, support, and practice, anyone can learn and develop cultural intelligence, he said.

Speaking to an overflow crowd in the Barker Center's Thompson Room, Livermore said the most successful organizations are those with strong leaders who own their cultural intelligence, use it, and make it part of the performance-review process for all employees. He said these

organizations train their workers and integrate diversity into their strategic focus.

"This interactive session was a fantastic opportunity to explore and discuss ways to increase personal and institutional cultural intelligence," said Talia Fox, a leadership development strategist and administrative fellow (AFP) at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "Dr. Livermore's dynamic dialogue looked at the individual decision-making process around adapting to differences and the impact of building culturally intelligent teams. The primary conclusion is that culturally intelligent organizations, not diversity alone, optimize business outcomes and increase effectiveness.

"My action step for the week," she added, "is to celebrate an expanded definition of culture and view personalities, nuances, values, and work styles as contributions to collective cultural brilliance."

*This story is published courtesy of the [Harvard Gazette](#), Harvard University's official newspaper. For additional university news, visit [Harvard.edu](#).*

Provided by Harvard University

Citation: Benefits of cultural intelligence are reflected in work performance (2014, November 4) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-benefits-cultural-intelligence.html>

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