



Psychological well-being in a multicultural work environment: The role of cultural intelligence

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35683/jcman1059.246>

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: Globalisation has led to increased interest in the field of cultural intelligence throughout the international arena. However, it seems to be of particular importance in South Africa since it is considered to be one of the most diverse societies in the world. In this article, psychological well-being is considered within the context of South African organisations, and the aim is to evaluate the role of cultural intelligence in promoting psychological well-being in this culturally diverse context.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative study was conducted, which involved 12 managers who work within culturally diverse organisations. The data were collected through one-on-one interviews and were thematically analysed.

Findings: The findings suggest that the participants experience autonomy, positive relations, meaning and purpose, and personal growth, which are indicative of positive psychological well-being.

Recommendations/value: The article suggests that more emphasis should be placed on the development of cultural intelligence at all organisational levels since this could promote psychological well-being, which may also positively influence organisational effectiveness.

Managerial implications: In multicultural workplaces, work environments must be created in such a way that individuals are encouraged to think independently and offer opinions and ideas without being socially pressured. By enhancing mental judgements within a culturally diverse work context, which is often characterised by problematic multicultural situations and engagements, employees are likely to function more effectively.



Keywords: Cultural diversity; cultural intelligence; diversity; psychological well-being; South Africa

JEL Classification: E71; M14; Z1

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa is home to a rich mixture of diversity-related variables. Although the benefits of diversity cannot be questioned, diversity, as a group variable, also holds potential challenges, such as poor communication, interpersonal disputes, and increased conflict (Sharma, 2019). Tajfel and Turner (1979:34) suggested the following: the more intense the intergroup conflict, “the more likely it is that the individuals that are members of the opposing groups will behave towards each other as a function of their respective group memberships,” rather than adhering to their individual beliefs and orientations. Moreover, this perception of group membership may lead to an “us versus them” mentality, which could negatively impact organisational effectiveness. It is, therefore, imperative to consider skills, competencies, and personal resources, such as tolerance for diversity, an inclusive mindset, collaborative ability, and co-creation to succeed in the new world of work (Holscher, 2023).

In South Africa, the diversification of the workplace gained prominence when the first democratic government was appointed in 1994 (Lezar, 2021). However, South Africa remains racially and economically unequal despite having a constitution and stringent labour legislation that promote equality. Accordingly, it is essential for South Africa to promote the advancement of cultural intelligence (CI) and appreciation of cultural diversity, both in and outside the workplace, so as to encourage economic, social, and political transformation (Lezar & Van der Walt, 2023). Furthermore, the complexity associated with culturally diverse workplaces has led to the conclusion that cross-cultural leadership is the most pressing 21st-century challenge, which necessitates CI (Lin, 2018). Without CI, organisational leaders may find it increasingly difficult to effectively manage diversity (Els & Jacobs, 2023) and establish social relationships at work, which are vital to employee health (Schermuly & Meyer, 2016).

Kotze and Massyn (2019) asserted that employee well-being should be a key priority for South African organisations; therefore, consideration should be given to the psychological well-being of employees in this demanding and culturally diverse context. This emphasis is necessary, since psychological well-being is related to positive organisational outcomes such as increased effort, performance, productivity, and work-related attitudes and behaviours (Kundi *et al.*, 2021). Els and Jacobs (2023) posited that, regardless of the benefits of CI, further

research is necessary to validate the influence of CI on psychological well-being. Against this background, it is argued that CI could promote the experience of psychological well-being in culturally diverse South African workplaces, while, at the same time, advancing cross-cultural engagements and organisational effectiveness.

1.1 Research objectives

As far as it could be established, there is a dearth of research studies that focus on psychological well-being in a culturally diverse work setting and the role of CI in promoting psychological well-being. To fill this research gap, the primary research objective of this study is to explore the experience of psychological well-being in culturally diverse South African organisations. This was conducted via a qualitative study that focused on the dimensions of psychological well-being identified by Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Keyes (1995): self-acceptance; environmental mastery; positive relations with others; personal growth; purpose in life; and autonomy. The secondary objective of this study is to consider the role of CI in advancing psychological well-being in a culturally diverse work context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the theoretical and context frameworks of the study will be presented.

2.1 Theoretical foundation

This study was approached based on the theory of positive psychology, which is regarded as the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive (Positive Psychology Centre, 2016). Since the constructs of CI and psychological well-being may be regarded as positive qualities, they tend to enhance happiness within the context of the workplace (Lezar & Van der Walt, 2023). Penncock and Alberts (2016) stated that positive psychology creates valuable insights with regard to experiencing a happy and fulfilling life, and provides useful tools that enable individuals to experience well-being and cope with challenges and obstacles. Positive psychology centres on positive experiences across a three-time point hierarchy: the past, which focuses on well-being, commitment, and satisfaction; the present, focusing on happiness and flow experiences; and the future, emphasising optimism and hope (Marais, 2015; Filippa, 2016). Seligman (2016) postulated that, through happiness, people are enabled to think constructively about the past and gain greater happiness in the present while having more optimism and hope for the future. Thus, it is possible that, by developing a positive quality such as CI, individuals will be presented with the opportunity to experience greater happiness in the present through establishing conducive relationships with culturally diverse individuals and, thus, garner more hope and optimism about their future. Moreover, CI is likely

to allow people of diverse cultures to garner insight into the behaviour of other individuals and become more skilful in effectively engaging with people from other cultures, which appears critical to achieving organisational effectiveness.

2.2 Contextual framework

The study considered two constructs, namely, CI and psychological well-being, which will be considered in this section.

2.2.1 Cultural intelligence (CI)

Cultural diversity has been associated with many positive outcomes, such as increased interpersonal interaction, as well as improved innovation and creativity (Forbes, 2015). However, it has also been associated with negative outcomes such as misunderstandings, because individuals from dissimilar cultures tend to perceive things differently (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). Thus, a lack of culturally intelligent engagements can become a risk and problematic for occupational relationships (Nikpour *et al.*, 2013). To prevent this risk from occurring in the contemporary workplace, CI seems to have become increasingly important, because it allows individuals to better understand cultural differences and work concurrently with people from diverse cultures by behaving in a culturally appropriate manner.

Licki and Van der Walt (2021) asserted that the culturally diverse nature of South African workplaces has led to increased cross-cultural interaction, which requires sensitivity towards cultural diversity. According to Solomon and Steyn (2017), the ability to function well in a culturally diverse setting is coined CI. CI, in the context of the workplace, was derived from observational evidence that organisational leaders in multinational companies needed to manage diverse workforces, which requires them to interact effectively in multinational cultures. However, this is not a skill or competency possessed by all (Jonck & Swanepoel, 2015). Rockstuhl *et al.* (2010:3) highlighted that an important starting point for the development of CI is how an individual is accustomed to the “embeddedness of the focal events of their psychological and social environment” and to establish how they relate to others. Moreover, the latter authors emphasised that an individual should, thus, note his/her situational embeddedness first, because it affects how he or she relates to others. Thus, it seems that intercultural exposure and situational embeddedness are critical not only for multinational firms where managers employ, train, promote, and prepare employees for worldwide assignments, but also for local business leaders who need to manage diverse workforces within a particular country.

CI is defined as an individual's capacity to function and manage tasks effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ng *et al.*, 2012). For the purpose of this article, CI is regarded as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of four interrelated components: cognitive, meta-cognitive, motivational, and behavioural CI (Ang *et al.*, 2007; Lovvorn & Chen, 2011). Cognitive CI refers to the knowledge that one has accumulated about different cultures, which can be sourced from and developed through personal and/or educational experiences (Solomon & Steyn, 2017). The meta-cognitive dimension of CI is the mental ability needed to understand cultural knowledge (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2017). Motivational CI refers to the capacity to direct one's "attention and energy towards learning about and functioning in situations characterised by cultural differences" (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015:6). Behavioural CI denotes an individual's ability to act appropriately when facing a range of cross-cultural situations (Livermore, 2010).

2.2.2 Psychological well-being

The literature suggests that well-being can be viewed from two perspectives, namely, the hedonic perspective, which refers to an individual's positive affective experiences that relate to subjective well-being, and the eudaimonic perspective, which denotes psychological well-being (Fredrickson *et al.*, 2013; Vazi *et al.*, 2013). For the purpose of this article, well-being is observed from a eudaimonic perspective, i.e., psychological well-being, since well-being is investigated in relation to CI, which includes social and cultural capabilities.

Psychological well-being comprises various psychological features, which promote positive human functioning (Sagone & De Caroli, 2013). Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Keyes (1995) posited that psychological well-being is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the following dimensions: self-acceptance; environmental mastery; positive relations with others; personal growth; purpose in life; and autonomy. For example, unconditional self-acceptance is defined as the acceptance of self: "whether or not he behaves intelligently, correctly, or competently and whether or not other people approve, respect, or love him" (Ellis, 1977:101). Self-acceptance is also regarded as the most recurrent dimension of psychological well-being; thus, it is regarded as a central feature of mental health and a characteristic of self-actualisation, optimal functioning and maturity (Ryff, 1989). The environmental mastery dimension refers to how well individuals manage their life situations in order to create or choose environments that are suitable to their psychic conditions (Rothmann, 2013; Ryff, 2014). This construct also refers to the ability to control and manage important life circumstances (Karraker, 2014). However, the third dimension, establishing positive relations with others, is at the heart of psychological well-being. This dimension refers to the importance of experiencing warm and trusting interpersonal relationships and the ability to love (Ryff,

1989). Establishing positive relationships with others is also associated with the capability to express strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human beings, which leads to deeper friendships and better identification with and understanding of others (Sagone & De Caroli, 2013).

Autonomy refers to “self-determination and independence, the ability to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways, regulation of behaviour from within, and the evaluation of the self by using personal standards” (Rothmann, 2013:125). This dimension of psychological well-being may, thus, be regarded as the ability to guide one’s own behaviour for it to be socially accepted (Keyes, 2007). The attainment of meaning and purpose in life is another core dimension of psychological well-being, which refers to “subjective judgements people make that their work is significant, worth doing, valuable and purposeful” (May *et al.*, 2004), as cited by Rothmann, 2013:133). Hence, if employees experience meaning and purpose in life, they are more likely to view their work as important, and will be more aware of their behaviour (Rothmann, 2013). Owing to the centrality of work in people’s lives, meaning in life may, to some extent, be achieved through a person’s work (De Klerk *et al.*, 2006). However, this is not a given; therefore, it seems necessary that employees should also experience a sense of connectedness with other employees. This assumption was confirmed by De Klerk (2005), who argued that the workplace has become the primary social institution where meaning and purpose are found; therefore, contemporary employees seek to experience connectedness, meaning, purpose, and hope within the context of the workplace (Kolodinsky *et al.*, 2008).

The final dimension of psychological well-being is personal growth, which refers to being ambitious and aiming to reach one’s maximum potential (Rothmann, 2013). Maslow’s (1954, 1970) hierarchy of needs theory states that individuals have a need to grow and develop until they reach the highest level of the needs hierarchy. This level is referred to as self-actualisation, a state in which an individual experiences complete intellectual, emotional, and spiritual fulfilment (Quatro, 2004). Although this does not hold true for all individuals, many people strive towards achieving self-actualisation. It is also postulated that, in order for employees to reach self-actualisation, meaningful and purposeful work is essential (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Moreover, individuals who reach this state of self-actualisation will be striving towards ultimate and self-transcending values that might include the following: truth; goodness; beauty; justice; oneness; order; comprehensiveness; and perfection (Maslow, 1966).

2.2.3 CI and Psychological well-being

Previous research (i.e., Berry & Sam, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 2001; Berry, 2006) focussing on CI and psychological well-being determined that cross-cultural transition and adaptation generate stress, which implies the need to appraise and cope with it through acculturation strategies, and so these factors influence psychological well-being (Chen, 2015). Ang *et al.* (2007) tested whether cultural adaptation, which includes psychological well-being, is related to CI for a United States (US) sample of undergraduate students. The study ascertained that two dimensions of CI, namely, motivational and behavioural CI, are related to two forms of cultural adaptation, such as cultural adjustment and psychological well-being. In another study conducted by Chen (2015), it was confirmed that CI was related to psychological well-being for a sample of indigenous students studying in the US. Moreover, a study conducted in India reflected similar results, which determined that CI is a significant predictor of acculturative stress and psychological well-being (Ayoob *et al.*, 2015). Yang and Chang (2017) found that metacognitive CI and motivational CI are statistically and significantly related to psychological well-being for an international student sample studying in Taiwan. Thus, in line with the findings from previous, mostly quantitative research, studies, it is expected that CI may play a role in advancing psychological well-being in the South African context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research method

In order to address the aim of the study, the study was approached from an interpretivist paradigm. The reasons for this are that we sought to understand reality (i.e., participants' experiences of CI and psychological well-being) through the meaning attributed to social actors (Hair *et al.*, 2016). Thus, it is assumed that knowledge is created by the participating individuals through their meaningful experiences (Ngulube, 2015). This study aims to draw conclusions and develop a pragmatic theory; thus, it was decided that an inductive approach would be the most appropriate since it allows for the identification of patterns in a data set (Hair *et al.*, 2016).

Qualitative research was conducted, which was exploratory in nature. The reason is that in-depth information was obtained, which was used to consider the relevance of CI in terms of psychological well-being within a work context. The researchers attempted to understand participants' perceptions, perspectives, and the role of CI in terms of psychological well-being based on participants' experiences, and, as such, a phenomenological strategy was employed

(Creswell, 2007). Following a phenomenological strategy, the data were considered thematically to extract the essence of the participants' meaning (Miles *et al.*, 2014).

3.2 Research participants

The population of the study is described as individuals working in South African organisations. Purposive sampling was used to draw the sample, which means that the sample was selected based on the knowledge of the researcher regarding the population, its features, and the nature of the researcher's research aims (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2019). Data were collected until saturation was reached. A total of 12 individuals, who are experienced in cultural diversity management protocols within South African organisations, were interviewed. Creswell (2013) posited that a sample size of 12 is regarded as sufficient for a phenomenological strategy. Hence, the final sample consisted of seven males (58%) and five females (42%) between the ages of 25 and 57. This sample consisted of a majority of participants having work experience of 6 years or more (only 1 participant had 5 years or less work experience), who also held post-matric qualifications and were working in different industries (e.g., retail; healthcare; security; agricultural; mining; telecommunication; energy; local government; and entertainment).

3.3 Data collection

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was granted by Central University of Technology, Free State. Data were collected by means of a carefully administered semi-structured interview schedule. Prior to the interviews, the participants were contacted and invited to participate in the research project. Once their consent was obtained to voluntarily participate in the study, a suitable interview date and time were confirmed. Preceding the interview, the researcher explained the importance and purpose of the study to the participants by means of a consent letter, which included the interview schedule. At the beginning of the interview, a positive rapport was established, which created a relaxed atmosphere for conducting the interviews (Hair *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, participants were assured that their participation was anonymous. The interview length and language used were confirmed to limit prejudice (Moon *et al.*, 2019). The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Furthermore, because the researcher becomes the research instrument during qualitative data collection, the trustworthiness of the study was ensured by considering aspects such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The following open-ended questions were posed to the participants:

Q1: To what extent does your capacity to engage effectively with people from different cultures contribute to your overall functioning as a person?

Q2: How would you describe your feelings about the present and past?

Q3: To what extent are you in control of your life circumstances?

Q4: Do you think it is important to understand differences between people?

Q5: How would you describe your capacity to understand people from other cultures?

3.4 Data analysis

A phenomenological strategy was employed to analyse the qualitative data. This implies that each written protocol was analysed so as to cluster statements together in an effort to identify themes and patterns. The themes were based on the categorisation of the codes developed from the participants' responses. Thus, the aim was to describe the common meaning of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). The recorded data were converted, transcribed, and uploaded on NVivo plus qualitative data analysis software.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participants working in culturally diverse workplaces alluded to the following sub-dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy; meaningful work; relatedness; and personal growth.

4.1 Theme 1: Autonomy

The majority of participants (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8) referred to autonomy by stressing that they were in control of their life and work circumstances. For example, Participant 1 felt that working in a multicultural environment allowed him to reach his full potential, because his company promotes freedom of expression. He explained it in the following manner:

"Like because of this thing about the diversity right now we, the thing that makes me in control of my life is we have rights. Now so everything, like at Company X, they will tell you that on our values we need to connect to each other, so we need to have open discussions; there is no hidden agendas, there is no taboos, we have the right to say whatever that we want to say as long as we express ourselves in a mindful manner. So as long as I can express myself, then I feel in control".

Regulation of behaviour from within is directly linked with autonomy (Ryan *et al.*, 1997). Participant 2 shared these views on the importance of accepting reactions from diverse individuals by explaining that:

"The things one had to learn was ... we can't control what is happening around us but we can how we react to it. So, I believe I'm not all the time cause we are all human beings...because there are times where it get to you, but, in most times, I believe I'm in control of what is happening around me."

In a related vein, Participant 6 stated:

"I am in control of my life circumstances; no one else can control me. It's hard that you can control 100% because it's a mental thing, actually, it's not obviously, all controlled by the decisions that are made for the country, but how I react to it is 100%."

4.2 Theme 2: Meaningful and purpose at work

In terms of meaning and purpose at work, Participant 2 indicated that he made a difference at work by being the mediator and trying to mend differences between diverse colleagues. He said:

"I strive for the thing that I want to do all of the time is to make a difference and to bridge the gaps between the different people and difference between the different people in the team. The different teams, like the interdepartmental things, I try to become like I'm sort of a glue or try to understand both because what I see is I'm coming from I can subscribe to both worlds."

Participants 8, 11, and 12 stated that cultural engagements have created meaning in a social context, which extends beyond the work environment. Participant 11 mentioned, for example, that:

"In a situation where I really got angry or mad at someone, and then someone from a different culture explained to me the way guys see it, or they understand ... and that quite changes your opinion about something. So, it's really meaningful. I think I became a calmer, more understanding person."

4.3 Theme 3: Relatedness

Some participants mentioned the sub-dimension of relatedness, explaining that working in multicultural organisations had positively contributed to building connections and warm relationships between people from diverse backgrounds. Participant 7 revealed that it had helped him to acquire a better understanding of other cultures by explaining that:

"It is also formed by my past experiences and interactions with other people. And the more I interact with other people the more I understand their cultures. I think it informs how I get that capacity to understand them."

Similarly, Participant 11 highlighted that:

"I have to spend time with an individual—what I do in my current position, if the guys are in the field with a specific job, I try to make time to visit them on site. It's

not to say that if I ask them a question that I'm doubting their knowledge or expertise. I observe first, and then I ask them certain questions and it's not like I say that I'm doubting them, but that's the way I interact with them. To understand how to interpret things, because everyone has different opinions and approaches to solve a problem and understanding that that's how I interact with them and that's how I get to know them and that's how you build relationships with the guys."

Participant 2 said:

"I think I've reached a stage where the objectives of the team and the company are way more important than who is around me so I can work well with basically anybody from any cultural difference or any cultural background."

Participant 9 also shared that:

"What we do, I will go to the guys in the field. I will do an on job assessments and observations, and then I will tell them I'm happy with the progress. And then, if they can push all within the work, rules and regulations and being safe, then we have a braai the end of the week, and that's how I tried to motivate the guys. I supply, let's say, that the meat or the stuff like that, and then if we meet the targets, then we have a social engagement. We sit back, we relax, we have a braai. We look at the progress, we discuss what we've done to see ways that we can improve and we never really had any unrest or negative vibes from anyone. It works for us like that."

4.4 Theme 4: Personal growth

Participant 5 referred to the personal growth (or learning) dimension of psychological well-being by stating that:

"I love it working at Company X. I think we are a very close family. We have a very good corporate culture, and I think that comes from being a multicultural organisation that every culture has something positive and something different to bring into the organisation, and it actually really does help us grow. And also, if you can learn from your colleagues about different cultures, you can carry that forward to how you deal with the general public, how you deal with your clients of the company when you speak to them if they're not of the same culture as you are and in your social life."

Participant 2 stated that:

“It developed you as a person; it developed your character... I became a better and stronger person, and I wouldn't have been if I joined another organisation maybe where it was not so culturally [diverse].”

Participant 4 stated that:

“Every engagement is a new experience, and one can learn more from the other person. The more you engage other cultures or other persons, the more you learn from it, and I think it will make you, at the end of the day, a better person going forward...whatever you've learnt through that experience you can use in another experience.”

The primary research objective of the study was to explore the experience of psychological well-being in culturally diverse South African organisations. From the findings presented, it is evident that the participants working in culturally diverse working environments experienced the following dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy, positive relations with others, personal growth, and meaning and purpose in life. The findings regarding autonomy are aligned with Deci and Ryan's (2013) self-determination theory, which emphasises the importance of autonomy and self-regulation. The scholars assert that individuals are inclined to naturally develop and grow, which facilitates more integrated and autonomous functioning. As such, their theory identifies autonomy as one of the essential psychological necessities for psychological health and well-being. Research on work environments that are supportive of autonomy confirmed that such environments result in positive individual outcomes, whereas more controlling environments have a negative impact on individual well-being (Slemp *et al.*, 2015). More recently, a study by Gardner (2020) confirmed that autonomy within the work environment contributes to psychological well-being.

Similar to autonomy, Deci and Ryan (2008) posited that when the context (e.g., the work environment) enables the fulfilment of psychological needs, such as autonomy and relatedness, well-being outcomes are promoted. Rothmann *et al.* (2019) emphasised the importance of relatedness in creating meaningful work. Research confirmed that when positive relationships are established, others can be better understood and identified with (Sagone & De Caroli, 2013), which is essential in multicultural work environments. CI seems to be of particular importance in terms of establishing positive relationships, because culturally intelligent individuals are likely to be more empathic towards employees from diverse cultures because they can identify with them (Souri & Hasanirad, 2011).

The participants' experiences of meaning conform with Van der Walt's (2008) study, which ascertained that work provides people with a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Allan *et al.* (2019) found that meaningful work predicts positive work-related outcomes, such as work engagement, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction. Furthermore, as was mentioned by the participants, meaningful work may also enhance well-being beyond the workplace, which includes individuals' life satisfaction, affect, and health. It is stated that psychological well-being results from striving toward meaning and a noble purpose beyond simple self-gratification (Fredrickson *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, the experience of meaning is influenced by one's culture; therefore, what is meaningful to one culture may not necessarily be meaningful to another culture (Rothmann *et al.*, 2019).

Serdiuk (2022) asserted that personal growth is driven by the desire for a sense of well-being and positive functioning. From the participant responses, it is evident that both interpersonal growth and intrapersonal growth were experienced. Interpersonal growth is experienced when one's need for friendship and love; relationships with others; and help and care for others are fulfilled (McAdams *et al.*, 1996). Intrapersonal growth is experienced when individuals perceive a high capacity to influence their environment, achieve important results for themselves, and reach an optimal level of self-management (Freire *et al.*, 2022). Thus, intercultural settings offer the opportunity for personal growth (Poole, 2022), which may include interpersonal and/or intrapersonal growth.

The secondary objective of this study was to consider the role of CI in advancing psychological well-being in a culturally diverse work context. In terms of autonomy, the participants stated that in multicultural workplaces, work environments are created in which they are encouraged to think independently and offer opinions without being socially pressured to reason in a certain way. Some participants also referred to regulating their behaviour from within and mentioned that, although they are not in control of others' behaviour, they regulate their behavioural responses to culturally identify with others. These responses are aligned with Keyes's (2007) assertion that autonomy allows an individual to regulate behaviour to be socially acceptable. Thus, self-regulation or self-control is related to autonomy (Ryan *et al.*, 1997). Nadel (1952) proffered that social existence involves controlled existence, implying that some form of constraint is required to form social relationships. The motivational dimension of CI seems to be relevant to promoting the autonomy dimension of psychological well-being. This dimension of CI includes aspects such as intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy (Livermore, 2010; Van Dyne *et al.*, 2012). Intrinsic motivation implies that high levels of enjoyment can be derived from interacting with other cultures, such as achieving

personal goals, autonomy, and more challenging job opportunities (Warnich *et al.*, 2018). This assertion aligns with the promotion focus of self-regulation, which centres on regulating behaviour, because it promotes positive relationships that enhance well-being (Higgins, 1997). Self-efficacy, which is also associated with the motivational dimension of CI, has been found to be positively related to self-regulation, well-being, and coping (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018). Thus, it is possible that motivational CI could promote the autonomy dimension of psychological well-being, because previous research established that self-efficacy and well-being are positively related. Self-efficacy further allows an individual to exercise control over their own level of functioning and actions that affect their life (Remhof *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, someone with a high CI is likely to persevere despite the challenge of functioning within an unfamiliar cultural environment (Bobanovic & Grzanic, 2019).

Participants also mentioned sub-dimensions of psychological well-being, such as meaning, purpose, and relatedness. Some of the participants divulged that spending time with culturally different individuals had assisted them in garnering a better understanding of these individuals, which promoted positive relationships. This is in line with the findings of Sagone and De Caroli (2013), who stated that establishing positive relationships with others leads to identifying and understanding them better, which may result in a greater sense of meaning and purpose. Therefore, as was previously stated, individuals with high levels of CI would probably be more empathic towards people from dissimilar cultures, because they are in a better position to identify with them (Souri & Hasanirad, 2011). Hence, to promote relatedness and a better understanding of culturally diverse individuals, is relevant to meta-cognitive CI. The meta-cognitive dimension of CI includes the ability to strategise across dissimilar cultures, which requires cultural understanding to resolve culturally complex problems (Livermore, 2010). Van Dyne *et al.* (2017) affirmed that the meta-cognitive dimension of CI is the mental ability required to comprehend cultural knowledge. Maldonado and Vera (2014) noted that meta-cognition resides within individuals who make sense of cultural differences in any situation. The authors further explained that individuals who have a cultural awareness ability, along with adequate sense to process this information meaningfully, possess the capacity to acquire new behaviours for their actions to be suitable in a new cultural environment. The basis of this meta-cognitive dimension is to think beyond what one currently understands; in other words, the awareness and understanding of one's own thoughts or cognitive processing (Rivas *et al.*, 2022). Morris *et al.* (2019) proffered that individuals who are mostly aware of their beliefs are always aware of the ways in which their ideals, convictions and principles affect their judgments.

Furthermore, meta-cognitive CI requires mindfulness or consciousness regarding one's own cultural assumptions, reflection during cross-cultural interactions, and adjusting cultural knowledge during interactions (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Bigolovic and Skerlavaj (2016) proffered that the meta-cognitive capability of individuals is accredited to the way in which they plan their behaviours before interacting. It is also evident in the way they monitor or check their assumptions during cross-cultural interactions. Finally, this is attributed to the manner in which they make mental judgements if expectations differ from experiences with cross-cultural interactions. However, Morris *et al.* (2019:47) asserted that cultural newcomers start with "unconscious incompetence" (known as blissful ignorance or unawareness), which then becomes "conscious incompetence" (i.e., metacognitive awareness of mistakes), and sets the stage for learning as to what is culturally appropriate. As deduced from the authors above, this dimension of CI allows an individual to make sense of complex situations. Blasco *et al.* (2012) postulated that the meta-cognitive dimension distinguishes CI from constructs such as cross-cultural and intercultural competence, global mindset, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence. This assertion is based on the premise that the meta-cognitive dimension binds together the facets of behaviour, mindfulness (or motivation), and knowledge, and, consequently, enables people to become culturally intelligent.

The final dimension of psychological well-being referred to was personal growth. Personal growth can possibly be advanced by CI, because cultural intelligence implies an advanced knowledge of oneself and that of other cultures and cross-cultural skills (Lezar, 2021). Boyd (2015) ascertained that increased knowledge assists individuals in expanding their search for answers beyond what they already know, which fosters vigilance through information exchange and leads to an improved collective understanding of individual connections within the work context. Similar to autonomy, motivational CI seems to be important as far as personal development is concerned, because motivational CI refers to the capacity to direct one's "attention and energy towards learning about and functioning in situations characterised by cultural differences" (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015:6). Accordingly, motivational CI advances personal growth and development through learning about culturally different individuals. Levy *et al.* (2016) mentioned that, through learning about cultural groups, negative attitudes can be abated, while, at the same time, understanding and respect for cultures can be promoted. As such, the cognitive or knowledge dimension of CI also seems relevant to the promotion of personal growth.

This study has a number of limitations. Since the researchers were the research instrument responsible for the interpretation of data, the possibility of subjectivity and bias may be evident

in the data analysis. However, the researchers were well-prepared for the interviews and attempted to be as objective as possible. Secondly, the study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of psychological well-being in a culturally diverse work context. Although rich data were obtained, the findings of the study cannot be generalised to diverse settings due to the unique experiences of the participants. It is, therefore, recommended that the study be extended to a wider population. This qualitative study argued that CI could play a role in advancing psychological well-being, and, therefore, it is also essential to measure and confirm this assertion quantitatively. This is important as qualitative research results cannot be generalised to larger populations. Furthermore, not only should CI be investigated in relation to psychological well-being, but psychological states, such as thriving, emotional well-being, and social well-being, should also be considered, so as to establish whether CI promotes holistic well-being and mental health in the workplace.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to expand on the current small-scale research of psychological well-being and CI within the South African work context. From the findings, it became evident that various dimensions of psychological well-being are experienced in culturally diverse workplaces, such as autonomy, meaning and purpose, relatedness, and personal growth. Overall, CI seems to play an essential role in promoting these dimensions of psychological well-being. The results further infer that various dimensions of CI should be considered to advance psychological well-being in culturally diverse workplaces. Theoretically, the study contributes to the limited knowledge of psychological well-being and CI in culturally diverse workplaces. Additionally, the study demonstrated the necessity of developing the CI of organisational leaders and members to promote social relationships and well-being in the work context. With the current challenges posed by the uncertain and complex external environment, it is crucial that sufficient attention be given to personal resources which could promote well-being in the work context.

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