

## **Interview with Dave Harbath**

Motiva International  
European Mentoring and Coaching Council of Turkey



***Interviewed by İpek Sahra Özgüler***  
*Istanbul, Turkey*

Dave Harbath specializes in coaching and training leaders, and teams with a particular focus on enhancing their Cultural Intelligence or the capabilities to function effectively across various cultural contexts. One of his greatest passions as an advanced certified cultural intelligence facilitator and executive coach with more than 25 years experience leading global multi-cultural teams is to help executives and teams unlock the potential of their cultural diversity.

He's a member of Motiva International's team of professional facilitators and coaches, and holds a CIPD/EMCC Certificate in Coaching and Mentoring with distinction, and is a qualified Advanced CQ (Cultural Intelligence) Certified Facilitator, and Assessor. He is also an active member of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council of Turkey and is a Former Member of the Board (2010-2012). He's passionate about his family, friends, culture, sailing and anything to do with the outdoors and nature.

*Note: this interview was conducted after Mr. Harbath's presentation at the 2017 PMI Turkey Chapter's PM Summit conference in Ankara.*

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**Ipek Sahra Özgüler (Özgüler):** *Good morning Dave. Overall, how was the PM Summit for you this year?*

**Dave Harbath (Harbath):** It was truly a pleasure and a personally rewarding experience being among such a high caliber group of professionals in Ankara as part of this year's annual PMI summit. I found the organizers, volunteers, participants and speakers to be highly energetic, engaged and passionate about this year's event and in particular their focus on the well chosen theme of the human factors in project management.

**Ozguler:** *What were the highlights in the PM summit?*

**Harbath:** There were too many insights and highlights to be recounted here however there were a few which come immediately to mind. First and foremost I found the warmth and hospitality of the entire PMI team and volunteers to be beyond expectations making the entire experience a memorable one. Other highlights for me were the amazing people I had the opportunity of meeting over the two days in Ankara, and I will never forget their commitment to the profession, as well as their curiosity, and drive for continuous development. I found everyone to be truly supportive of each other and utterly open and honest in how they shared their personal experience and knowledge, all with the intent of further developing the PM profession. And, lastly the other highlights which stayed with me throughout the entire conference were those made by opening key note speaker Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez in which he outlined the challenges in terms of where project management sits in the minds of top leaders and organizations, and more importantly the overall positive outlook he outlined for the future of the project management profession. It was this positive outlook that resonated for me personally throughout the remainder of the two days in Ankara as I presented and listened to the other speakers.

**Ozguler:** *What is your main topic in your speech? Please give detail information.*

**Harbath:** Leading With Cultural Intelligence. Mahatma Gandhi the famous civil rights leader once said, *"The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problem"* and it's this idea he had of unlocking that trapped human potential that's central to the growing sense of urgency companies are feeling today as they strive to achieve a competitive advantage in a culturally diverse and increasingly complex global business environment.

Speaking of globalization, it's certainly been a double edged sword providing us with an extremely rich environment of project work from acquisitions, global expansions, and IT systems roll outs, to satellite and product launches. And on the other hand it's resulted in an environment of increasingly complex customer needs, matrix structures, virtual or remote teams, workforce diversity, the VUCA world we have all come to know and love, as well as a large gap in the skills necessary to work effectively across cultures.

In fact in a recent survey by the *Economist Intelligence Unit* across 68 countries almost 90% of leading executives called out cross-cultural leadership as one of their top challenges for the coming century

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*Ninety percent of leading executives from 68 countries said finding effective cross-cultural personnel is a top management challenge.*

And, it's with these global backdrop in mind that I had the pleasure of sharing with the audience some of the work I've been doing in collaboration with the Cultural Intelligence Center to help project leaders and teams become more effective in taking advantage of the cultural diversity left in the wake of globalization by developing their Cultural Intelligence or CQ. More on this later however essentially **Cultural intelligence** or CQ is our capability to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds and perspectives.

*Cultural Intelligence: The capability to function effectively across various cultural contexts (national, ethnic, organizational, generational, etc.).*

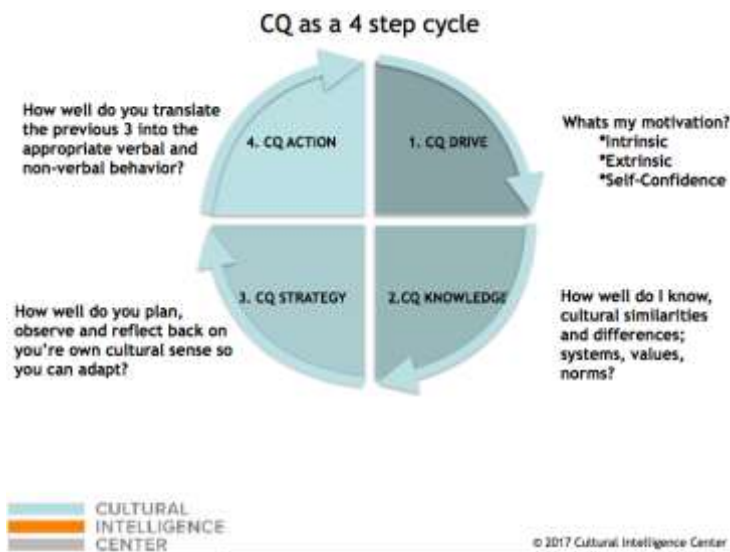
--Soon Ang and Linn Van Dyne, "Conceptualization of Cultural Intelligence" in Handbook of Cultural Intelligence: Theory, Measurement, and Applications (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 3.

Having had the privilege of working with global executives, organizations and multi-cultural teams for the past 25 plus years I've personally witnessed, like many of those that attended the PMI Summit in Ankara, how globalization and technology advances have radically changed the way companies are doing business today.

So if we think of leadership as our ability to influence, inspire, and enable people to contribute effectively to the success of the organization then global leadership or leading with Cultural Intelligence is our ability as project leaders to influence, inspire, and enable people from different cultural backgrounds and perspectives to cooperate and contribute effectively to the success of the organization or project.

Why is it then that some project leaders are able to build trust and foster cooperation with people from different cultural backgrounds while others struggle? And, how do you give feedback or deliver bad news to a colleague or subordinate who comes from a culture that values a direct, objective conversation when you come from a culture that values relationships, harmony and saving face? And, how do companies develop amazing domestic project leaders into global project leaders? It's these types of questions and more that come up as we're confronted with those common dilemmas all of us face in today's culturally diverse environment. The core question however behind the cultural intelligence research is **"What's the difference between individuals and organizations that succeed in today's globalized, multicultural world and those that fail?"**

It's interesting to note that the question was not "who are the most culturally sensitive or who were the most culturally knowledgeable" in spite of these being important to cultural intelligence, knowledge and sensitivity are not enough.



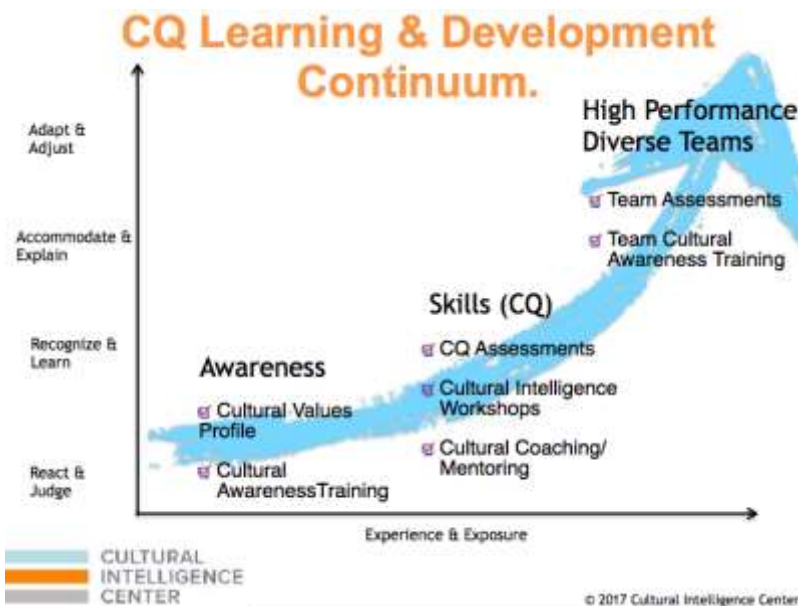
The rigorous research behind cultural intelligence has shown there are four capabilities which consistently show up among leaders that work effectively across cultures and they are: **1 CQ Drive:** Your level of motivation, interest and confidence to interact in culturally diverse environments.

This is a foundational capability, and it's your inner game that will shape the things to come. As a project leader is your mind in the game? What is it that makes you interested in working with

people with different cultural backgrounds? Is it the intrinsic enjoyment of connecting with other cultures or is it possibly the extrinsic benefits you gain professionally from the experience? Whichever of these drives you, having the confidence and knowing the relevance of how cultural understanding impacts your ability to influence, inspire and enable the team to deliver superior results is critical to your success.

**2 CQ Knowledge:** Your depth of knowledge of cultural similarities and differences in values, norms, and systems, and leadership styles. How well do you understand the cultural value dimension or unwritten rules of the road which we all learn at an early age, and how they shape and influence the way individuals think and behave as they are confronted with cultural dilemmas? And how well do you know the visible and unseen differences between cultures as we discussed while looking at the onion, the iceberg and the glasses analogies for culture?

Influencing and persuasion skills are critical to the success of any project manager and an area where culture plays a crucial role. You may recall the example of the front loaded slide deck vs. the back loaded slide deck. In German and French culture for example there is a preference to hear the presenter provide a solid business case including the data and methodology up front (front loaded deck or deductive reasoning) prior to presenting their conclusions while in the case of the American culture the preference is generally to insert a little humor at the start of the presentation and move quickly to the conclusions and next steps while leaving any data and methodology in the back up slides (inductive reasoning) in case someone ask. This will not always be the case when working with French, Germans and Americans however it's important to build a broad understanding of the various cultural value dimensions as you prepare to enter any cross cultural situation.



This example rings true not only for influencing and persuading but also for how we give feedback, how we build trust, how we approach conflict, and how decisions are made by consensus or top down. As your experience and exposure grows you'll build a better understanding of the ten cultural value dimensions such as individualism vs collectivism which is important to enabling everyone's voice to be heard or relationship vs task

cultures which have different approaches to building trust. With focus and determination you'll build a solid repertoire of cultural knowledge.

**3 CQ Strategy:** Your ability to plan, observe and reflect back on your own assumptions. Here is where things get really interesting because it is at this point that you start to draw on your motivation, knowledge and self-awareness to plan before going into any culturally diverse situation and ensure you test your assumption before acting. The project management world is fast paced, complex and full of tight deadlines and pressure which is where often times our quick intuitive decision making process comes into play in order to survive. However, it's in times of stress such as when it's no longer amusing that different cultures have different time orientations and are late to meetings, or when trust breaks down when someone is overly task oriented at the expense of the relationship that we need to step back and reflect before acting. This is a time for mindful and non-judgmental observation and reflection to ensure cultural biases don't cloud our ability to act appropriately based on the situation. It doesn't mean we'll always get it right however as your experience grows you'll begin to understand how far you and others can and will stretch beyond their comfort zones in order to cooperate for the success of the project.

**4 CQ Action:** Your ability to adapt verbal and non-verbal behavior in a culturally diverse situation. This is the final capability which draws on the previous three and shows how well you translate all that motivation, knowledge, and planning into a culturally appropriate behavior. This is where the capability of a project leader to influence, inspire and enable a high performance team to contribute to the success of the project is most visible. Let's face it, it's often times our verbal and non-verbal actions which define our success, and create perceptions in the minds of those around us that makes the difference between leaders that succeed and those that fail in today's global environment.

One of the earlier challenges I experienced when I first moved to Istanbul to manage the Levant or Eastern Mediterranean region was my ability to adapt my leadership style from a participative one that encouraged empowerment, self-initiative, and collaboration to one more suitable in the emerging markets that required a bit more distance between myself and my team and a little more assertiveness and guidance than I was used to. In time I was able to find the right balance and understand when to adapt and when not to.

The key to developing our cultural agility in terms of behavior is through self-awareness of our own cultural values, and our ability to decode the cultural values of those around us, understanding the significance of the gaps if any. It's when we find ourselves in a stressful cultural dilemma that the first thing we'll want to do is understand the gap in cultural value dimensions between us and those around us. Once we understand the gap it's then that we can begin to plan and practice the behavior needed to stretch our comfort zone in an authentic way to help reconcile the various cultural perspectives.

As previously mentioned, the good news is that anyone with the desire and interest can develop their CQ. And, being a member of the PMI organization provides you with an excellent opportunity to talk with others and build an understanding of the attributes required to lead inter-culturally. Networking with other project leaders to share experiences is a great way to start. Remember, improving your Cultural Intelligence works as effectively internationally as it does here at home.

*You can learn more about CQ Assessment and Cultural Intelligence Workshops by contacting Dave Harbath at [dave@motivainternational.net](mailto:dave@motivainternational.net) or learn more about the research behind CQ at the Cultural Intelligence Center website [www.culturaliq.com](http://www.culturaliq.com). CQ is a registered trademark of the Cultural Intelligence Center*

**Ozguler:** *As you know, the main topic of PM Summit is “Human Factors in Project Management”. What is the relationship between human factors and project management?*

**Harbath:** For me the human factor in project management is one of the most important elements which lies at the crossroads between success and failure of any project. Although the technology, methodology, and all the other elements PMs learn to apply are important to their success it's their ability to act as integrators, facilitating, fostering, inspiring, and enabling cooperation among culturally diverse team members to contribute to the success of the project.

**Ozguler:** *What do you see for the future in terms of that? Why are human factors so important in project management?*

**Harbath:** Globalization is all around us which means that Cultural Intelligence is no longer a “nice to have” capability for project leaders, but a “must have” capability. And, as mentioned earlier, in order for project leaders to grow in relevance and create greater value for their organization they’ll need to become adept at integrating members for greater cooperation by unleashing the cultural diversity around them. The risk for leaders failing to develop their cultural agility has been proven to result in an environment where cooperation is inhibited, and participation stifled resulting in a further decline in employee engagement, innovation, and productivity.

**Ozguler:** *In the future, robots are expected to replace humans in almost every field of work. How will project management be affected by this transformation?*

**Harbath:** It is undeniable that globalization, the internet of things (IOT), digitization, automation, robotics and industry 4.0 are playing a major role in the race towards differentiation, greater innovation and increased productivity. And, like all disruptive transitions of the past robotics is having a profound impact on the way organizations do business today and in the future. In order for organizations to continue achieving a competitive advantage and lead in their industry, I believe robotics will necessitate them to shift their focus to more effectively leveraging the culturally diverse workforce left in wake of globalization. As robotics begins to take on some of the more transactional work in project management, I foresee project leaders with high Cultural Intelligence (CQ) will be ideally situated to create greater value, and play an increasingly important role as integrators, fostering greater cooperation within culturally diverse teams.

## About the Interviewer



### **İpek Sahra Özgüler**

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**İpek Sahra Özgüler** graduated from the Istanbul University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 10 years' experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in January, 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has managed a variety of projects across manufacturing, defence, FMCG (Cola Cola), insurance (Euler Hermes), audit (Deloitte), telecommunication, ICT and aviation sectors and gained broader insights. In addition, she has worked as international correspondent for the *PM World Journal* since 2014.

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