

## C2BC- 098 Cultural Intelligence - Asma Ahmad

Asma Ahmad

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<https://www.zahaexperience.com>

<https://gulfnnews.com/going-out/society/zaha-brings-cultures-together-through-food-1.2270187>

<https://www.arabianbusiness.com/startup/419708-entrepreneur-of-the-week-asma-ahmad-founder-of-social-enterprise-zaha>

Zaha = “growth journey”

“expose to knowledge that encourages them to reconsider...”

Choose to Trust

Social enterprise

Empathy, cultural exchange

Her project aims to encourage and develop cultural intelligence that follows three main social values: acceptance, empathy, and evolvment.

“Zaha is an immersive cultural experience that provides an opportunity to connect and engage with people from other cultures, through co-created food experiences and storytelling,”

The Zaha Experience incorporates three components:

1. The first being the tasting of **authentic food**, which offers explorers a moment of bonding with people from the addressed culture.
2. The second is **storytelling** by the host along with the explorers, which drives deeper engagement and participation in the experience, allowing a cross-cultural bonding to evolve at the human level.

3. The third is **co-creation**, which **leverages a key food ingredient** of the addressed culture **to create dishes for other cultures.**

1983 b. Kuwait, 8 bro & sis  
1991 return to Palestine  
college & MBA in UK  
Kuwait working for consultancy  
Dubai

Arabian Business Global “Entrepreneur of the Week”, May 2019

“You have to empathise with yourself first and then with others,”

“I came up with Zaha as a reminder to people that what unites us is greater than what can divide us,” said Ahmad.

“Our objective is to replace cultural misconceptions with empathy and understanding, create a tighter social network for newcomers, activate social cohesion, build trust with new contacts, build confidence in translating their personal experience and explore and increase skills that can be monetised.”

Zaha has grown to become a platform that offers a cultural tool kit to enable people to creatively curate experiences that reflect multi-cultures that are within them.

I want it to become a home away from home to those who feel they are culturally/socially isolated – or just not embraced – through exploring cultures that are within us.

**Cultural intelligence** or **cultural quotient (CQ)** is a term used in business, education, government and academic research. Cultural intelligence can be understood as the capability to relate and work effectively across cultures.

<https://culturalq.com> Cultural Intelligence Center  
Starbucks, BMW, Walmart, IBM, McDonalds  
FB <https://www.facebook.com/leadingwithculturalintelligence>  
@CQ\_Center

<https://hbr.org/2004/10/cultural-intelligence>

- P. Christopher Earley

- [Elaine Mosakowski](#)

occasionally an outsider has a seemingly natural ability to interpret someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures in just the way that person's compatriots and colleagues would, even to mirror them. We call that *cultural intelligence* or *CQ*.

Cultural intelligence is related to emotional intelligence, but it picks up where emotional intelligence leaves off. A person with high emotional intelligence grasps what makes us human and at the same time what makes each of us different from one another. A person with high cultural intelligence can somehow tease out of a person's or group's behavior those features that would be true of all people and all groups, those peculiar to this person or this group, and those that are neither universal nor idiosyncratic. The vast realm that lies between those two poles is culture.

One critical element that cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence do share is, in psychologist Daniel Goleman's words, "a propensity to suspend judgment—to think before acting."

The people who are socially the most successful among their peers often have the greatest difficulty making sense of, and then being accepted by, cultural strangers.

people who are somewhat detached from their own culture can more easily adopt the mores and even the body language of an unfamiliar host.

three components of cultural intelligence: the cognitive; the physical; and the emotional/motivational. Cultural intelligence resides in the body and the heart, as well as the head.

**HEAD:** devise what we call learning strategies.

**BODY:** your actions and demeanor must prove that you have already to some extent entered their world.

**HEART:** A person who doesn't believe herself capable of understanding people from unfamiliar cultures will often give up after her efforts meet with hostility or incomprehension

#### Cultivating Cultural Intelligence

1. personal SWOT
2. select training in areas of weakness
3. practice, rewards
4. inventory, leverage assets
5. enter culture
6. revisit, adjust

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/iese/2015/03/24/why-you-need-cultural-intelligence-and-how-to-develop-it/#68dcdf4117d6>

cross cultural skills:

1. relational skills; whether you enjoy talking and interacting with people from other cultures
2. **tolerance of uncertainty**; whether you are able to tolerate uncertainties, ambiguities and unexpected changes in an intercultural interaction
3. adaptability; whether you can change your behavior according to the cultural demands
4. **empathy**; whether you can put yourself in a culturally different person's shoes and imagine the situation from his or her perspective
5. perceptual acuity; whether you understand other people's feelings and subtle meanings during intercultural interactions

You're listening to WERA-LP, Arlington, Virginia, 96.7 FM – streaming and on demand at [wera.fm](http://wera.fm)

Coming to you from the studios at Arlington Independent Media, I'm your host Lynn Borton – and this is *Choose to be Curious – welcome!*

In my family, the cranberry sauce decides who does the Thanksgiving dishes.

Along with all the holiday standards, our table is always set with both a chunky, homemade cranberry sauce – *really more like a relish or jam, but not too sweet!* – and the classic cranberry jelly from a can.

The jelly is plopped into a bowl, standing upright, on end.

The rule is: you take your scoops of jelly from the bottom and whoever makes the jelly fall does the dishes.

This rule is irrefutable.

It is Absolute.

We accept it for what it is. Everyone plays the game. And everyone accepts the outcome.

It is arguably arbitrary, even patently ridiculous, as more than one guest has protested, but it's our rule and we like it.

In fact, I suspect we *like* its ridiculousness.

*How else are you going to decide who does the dishes?*

As the Holiday season approached, I found myself thinking about traditions and culture, the intangible heritage of home and community that marks each of us as from some very specific place, some very particular people.

When we join others for a meal, *holiday or otherwise*, we navigate norms that may or may not be clear to us. We enter cultures perhaps markedly different from our own.

Some of us *enjoy* that experience more than others.

Some of us *manage* it better than others.

Why is that?

How might we become more comfortable, more adept, in those situations?

And might *choosing to be curious* about our *own* practices, *our own culture*, --- help us understand and immerse in others' better?

This is a show all about curiosity, we talk about research and theory, but mostly it's conversations about how curiosity shows up in work and life --- *or over a meal, and in the face of the unfamiliar*

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Some people can sit at the table (literal or figurative) with others and can interpret unfamiliar or even ambiguous gestures or practices like a native.

We call that *cultural intelligence*.

Cultural intelligence is the capability to relate and work effectively across cultures.

In reading about cultural intelligence I was struck that its cultivation calls upon so many aspects of *curiosity* – empathy, adaptability, a tolerance for ambiguity...

I got reading about cultural intelligence *not* because I knew of its link back to curiosity, but because I had the good fortune to meet Asma Ahmad.

Asma is the visionary and driving force behind the social enterprise start up, Zaha, an immersive cultural experience that provides opportunities to connect and engage with people from other cultures, through co-created food experiences and storytelling.

Zaha's objective is to replace cultural misconceptions with understanding, .... create a tighter social network for newcomers,.... activate social cohesion,.... build trust with new contacts,.... build confidence in translating their personal experience and explore and increase skills that can be monetised. It is grounded in three essential values: *empathy, inclusion and curiosity*.

A Palestinian, born in Kuwait, educated in the UK, now living in Dubai, Asma was an Arabian Business Global's "Entrepreneur of the Week" earlier this year. She says she "*came up with Zaha as a reminder to people that what unites us is greater than what can divide us.*"

I can think of no more important conversation today than this one.

*Welcome Asma! Thank you for joining us from Dubai and the United Arab Emirates –*

- What was the inspiration for Zaha?
- Describe the Zaha experience.
  - Maestros & Explorers
  - three components:
    - The first being the tasting of authentic food, bonding with people from the addressed culture.
    - The second is storytelling which drives deeper engagement and participation in the experience, allowing a cross-cultural bonding
    - The third is co-creation, which leverages a key food ingredient of the addressed culture to create dishes for other cultures.
  - Explain intangible heritage
- Anthony Bourdain, the chef, best-selling author, TV star, travel expert, entrepreneur, said : *"If I'm an advocate for anything, it's to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. Walk in someone else's shoes or at least eat their food. It's a plus for everybody."*
  - Zaha is also built around sharing food.
  - What is it about sharing food that is so valuable?
- Zaha = Arabic "growth journey" = grandmother's name
- Love your values – tell us more!
  - *Empathy, inclusion, curiosity*
  - How does curiosity manifest in Zaha?
  - *Zaha aspires to make communities more culturally intelligent – describe.*
    - *Abilities necessary to select, shape, and adapt to an environment*
    - *CQ dimensions:*
      - *Metacognitive (acceptance of cultural confusion, suspension of judgment)*
      - *Cognitive (knowledge of norms, values of other culture)*
      - *Motivational (direct attention and energy toward learning about)*
- How did your own experience as an immigrant and outsider influence your thinking about Zaha?
- You talk about being willing to "trust the process" – tell me more about that..
- What does it mean to "explore cultures with empathy"?
- For those of us who live too far from UAE/Dubai to be an Explorer, let alone a Maestro, how might we create a little Zaha in our own lives?

#ANALOGY

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Don't forget to send me your \_\_\_\_\_ analogy #ANALOGY.

Many thanks to my guest Asma Ahmad. Check out Zaha and links to more information about cultural intelligence on my website. Special thanks to our mutual friend Mohammed Ali for making the curiosity connection between me and Asma – *we love you Mo!*

Our theme music is by Sean Balick, "A Burst of Light" by Delray from Blue Dot Sessions.

Our theme music is by Sean Balick; "The Shoes They Wear" by Delray, from Blue Dot Sessions.

*As you go through the week, how might you cultivate your cultural intelligence and reveal some more of your intangible heritage to someone else?*

I hope you'll join me again next time – and until then, *choose to be curious!*