Social intelligence for the social leaders

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ABSTRACT

Social Intelligence, an emerging new science with startling implications for our interpersonal world. If the purpose of education is to teach students skills they need to be well-prepared for life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness...and most likely the pursuit of gainful employment, then teaching social skills must be a crucial part of education. There are new requirements of today's and tomorrow's social leaders and members, and they all demand social intelligence.

Introduction

Social intelligence has been described by Paulo Freire as 'critical consciousness and it requires extraordinary abilities to recognize oneself as being a member of an oppressed class and seeing our oppression as a situation which we can transform through informed action'.

According to psychologist E. L. Thorndike, who founded the study of social intelligence, the term should be defined as ``the ability to act wisely in human relations". Thorndike felt it was difficult to believe this type of intelligence, as opposed to abstract intelligence or mechanical intelligence. Some psychologists, however, disagreed with this assessment. Social intelligence includes the whole range of mankind's relationships with other humans and with the world in general. Social intelligence, in other words, is much broader than political awareness or psychological savvy or enlightened activism. It includes discernment of all social conditioning, from ritual to religion, from MTV to metaphysics, from jet-set to down-sizing. So social intelligence includes the qualities of:

• Seeing through the current social myths and diversions
• Understanding the necessity of life-long self-education
• Recognizing the necessity of social action, including discerning what the social situation requires and creating a programme to realize social reform
• Developing genuine feelings of compassion and regard for one's fellow human beings.

Physiology of Social Intelligence

Social intelligence is a set of interpersonal competencies, built on specific neural circuits that inspire people to be effective. How the brain's mirror neurons enable a person to reproduce the emotions she detects in others and, thereby, have an instant sense of shared experience. Organizational studies document this phenomenon in contexts ranging from face-to-face performance reviews to the daily personal interactions that help a leader retain prized talent. Other social neurons include spindle cells, which allow leaders to quickly choose the best way to respond to someone, and oscillators, which synchronize people's physical movements. Great leaders are those whose behaviours powerfully leverage this complex system of brain interconnectedness.

Components of Social Intelligence

Social intelligence has two components:

• Social awareness
• Social facility

Social awareness includes:

Primal empathy : Feeling with others, sensing emotional signals.
Attunement : Listening with full receptivity
Empathic accuracy : Understanding another person's thoughts, feelings and intentions
Social cognition : Knowing how the social world works.

Social facility includes:

Synchrony : Interacting smoothly at the verbal level
Self presentation : Presenting ourselves effectively
Influence : Shaping the outcome of social interactions
Concern : Caring about others' needs and acting accordingly.

Primal Empathy:

We keep sending signals all the time about what we feel.

Attunement:

Attunement means offering a person total attention and listening fully. It goes beyond momentary empathy to a full sustained presence that facilitates rapport.

It means trying to understand the other person rather than just making our own point.

We can facilitate attunement simply by intentionally paying more attention. Full listening maximizes psychological synchrony so that emotions align.

Empathic accuracy:

This probably represents the essential expertise in social intelligence. Empathic accuracy builds on primal empathy but adds an explicit understanding of what someone else feels and thinks. Additional activity in the neocortex thus bringing high road circuitry to the primal empathy of the low.

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Our brain attunes us to what someone intends to do but it does so at a subliminal level. Conscious awareness of someone's intentions allows a more explicit understanding of underlying motives. This can make a big difference and facilitate more accurate empathy.

Social cognition: This is knowledge about how the social world actually works. People who are good at this know what is expected in different social settings.

Synchrony: Synchrony lets us glide gracefully through a non verbal dance with another person. A failure in synchrony sabotages social competence. People, who are weak here, typically suffer from dyssemia, a deficit in reading and acting on the non verbal signs that guide smooth interactions.

Self presentation: This is the ability to express oneself in ways that make a desired impression. Charismatic people know how to express themselves in such a way that enables others to sync up well with them and be tuned to their feelings. The ability to control our emotions and avoid an excessive display sometimes holds the key to self presentation.

Influence: We must express ourselves in a way that produces a desired social result. Those adept at deploying influence rely on social influence to guide their actions. For example, they may turn a blind eye to some situations to protect a relationship.

Concern: Concern goes beyond empathy. Concern reflects a person's capacity for compassion. Concerned people take out time to help a colleague. They understand the need for greater cooperation to meet larger objective.

Social Intelligence and Managerial Skills

Leadership and management ideas come and go. But a few business ideas transcend trendiness and become part of accepted management wisdom. The most important of these big ideas currently is that biology--specifically neuroscience--can be mined for clues and cues that inform how we behave in an organization environment. That is, what do our brains tell us about how leadership works?

The most important work to come out of this so far is referred to as emotional and social intelligence--a theory that our behavior can affect how people around us behave. In an education institution context this means that improving your social intelligence will make you a better leader and, therefore improve performance.

To measure an executive's social intelligence and help him or her develop a plan for improving it, there is a special behavioral assessment tool, developed by Harvard Business School called the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory. It is a 360-degree evaluation instrument by which bosses, peers, direct reports, clients, and sometimes even family members assess a leader according to seven social intelligence qualities. The Harvard Business School came up with these seven by integrating their existing emotional intelligence framework with data assembled by their colleagues at the Hay Group, who used hard metrics to capture the behavior of top-performing leaders at hundreds of corporations over two decades. Listed here are each of the qualities, followed by some of the questions they use to assess them.

Empathy
• Do you understand what motivates other people, even those from different backgrounds?
• Are you sensitive to others' needs?
Attunement
• Do you listen attentively and think about how others feel?
• Are you attuned to others' moods?
Organizational Awareness

• Do you appreciate the culture and values of the group or organization?
• Do you understand social networks and know their unspoken norms?
Influence
• Do you persuade others by engaging them in discussion and appealing to their self-interests?
• Do you get support from key people?
Developing Others
• Do you coach and mentor others with compassion and personally invest time and energy in mentoring?
• Do you provide feedback that people find helpful for their professional development?

Inspiration
• Do you articulate a compelling vision, build group pride, and foster a positive emotional tone?
• Do you lead by bringing out the best in people?
Teamwork
• Do you solicit input from everyone on the team?
• Do you support all team members and encourage cooperation?

Social Intelligence in Life Tasks

Although the social intelligence view of personality diverges from the psychometric approach to social intelligence on the matter of assessment, it agrees with some contemporary psychometric views that intelligence is context-specific. Thus, in Sternberg's (1985, 1988) triarchic theory, social intelligence is part of a larger repertoire of knowledge by which the person attempts to solve the practical problems encountered in the physical and social world.

According to Cantor and Kihlstrom (1987), social intelligence is specifically geared to solve the problems of social life, and in particular to manage the *life tasks*, *current concerns* (Klinger 1977) or *personal projects* (Little, 1989) which the person selects for him or herself, or which other people impose on him or her from outside. Put another way, one's social intelligence cannot be evaluated in the abstract, but only with respect to the domains and contexts in which it is exhibited and the life tasks it is designed to serve. And even in this case, "adequacy" cannot be judged from the viewpoint of the external observer, but rather from the point of view of the subject whose life tasks are in play.

Life tasks provide an integrative unit of analysis, for the analysis of the interaction between the person and the situation. They may be explicit or implicit, abstract or circumscribed, universal or unique, enduring or stage-specific, rare or commonplace, ill-defined or well-defined problems. Whatever their features, they give meaning to the individual's life, and serve to organize his or her daily activities. They are defined from the subjective point of view of the individual: they are the tasks which the person perceives himself- or herself as "working on and devoting energy to solving during a specified period in life (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987, p. 168).

First and foremost, life tasks are articulated by the individual as self-relevant, time consuming and meaningful. They provide a kind of organizing scheme for the individual's activities and they are embedded in the individual's ongoing daily life. And they are responsive to the demands, structure and constraints of the social environment in which the person lives. Life tasks are imposed on people and the ways in which they are approached may be constrained by socio-cultural factors. However, unlike the stage-structured views of Erikson (1950) and his popularizers (e.g., Levinson, 1978; Sheehy, 1976), the social-intelligence view of personality does not propose that

everyone at a particular age is engaged in the same sorts of life tasks. Instead, periods of transition, where the person is entering into new institutions, are precisely those times where individual differences in life tasks become most apparent.

For example, Cantor and her associates have chosen the transition from high school to college as a particularly informative period to investigate life tasks (Cantor, Acker, and Cook-Flanagan, 1992) Freshman year is more than just convenient for academic researchers to study.

The transition from high school to college and adulthood is a critical developmental milestone, where many individuals leave home for the first time to establish various independent habits and lifestyles.

And although the decision to attend college may have been made for them (or may not have been a *decision* at all, but just a fact of life), students still have a great deal of leeway to decide for themselves that they are going to do with the opportunity – what life tasks will occupy them for the next four years. Accordingly, when college students are asked to list their life tasks, they list social life tasks (e.g., *making friends* or *being on my own*) as often as they list academic ones (e.g., *getting good grades* or *carving a future direction*). And while the majority of students' life tasks could be slotted into a relatively small number of common categories, their individual construals of these tasks were quite unique, and led to equally unique strategies for action.

The intelligent nature of life-task pursuit is clearly illustrated by the strategies deployed in its service. People often begin to comprehend the problem at hand by simulating a set of plausible outcomes, relating them to previous experiences stored in autobiographical memory.

They also formulate specific plans for action, and monitor their progress toward the goal, taking special note of environmental factors which stand in the way, and determining whether the actual outcome meets their original expectations.

Much of the cognitive activity in life-task problem solving involves forming causal attributions about outcomes and in surveying autobiographical memory for hints about how things might have gone differently.

Particularly compelling evidence of the intelligent nature of life task pursuit comes when, inevitably, plans go twisted toward one side or some unforeseen event frustrates progress.

Then, the person will map out a new path toward the goal or even choose a new goal compatible with a superordinate life task. Intelligence frees us from reflex, tropism and instinct, in social life as in nonsocial domains.

Social Intelligence for Leadership Practices

For outstanding leadership requires social intelligence. The leadership competencies that build on self-mastery include self-confidence, the drive to improve performance, staying calm under pressure, and a positive outlook. All these abilities can be seen at full force, for instance, in workers who are outstanding individual performers.

When Claudio Fernando-Araoz, head of research for the executive recruitment firm Egon Zehnder International, looked at CEOs who had succeeded and those who had failed, he found the same pattern in America, Germany and Japan: those who failed were hired on the basis of their drive, IQ, and business expertise – but fired for lack of emotional intelligence.

They simply could not win over or sometimes even just get along with, their board of directors, or their direct reports, or others on whom their own success depended.

Several new studies confirm how essential social intelligence – as opposed to simple self-mastery – can be for leadership effectiveness. The findings:

• At a transportation company: those leaders strongest in the social intelligence competencies led greater revenue growth, compared to executives with strengths only in the self-mastery competencies.

• The same goes for banking: at a major nationwide bank, high social intelligence (but not self-mastery alone) predicted executive's yearly performance appraisal, which in turn reflects business success.

• The value of social intelligence even applies to clergy: among Catholic priests, greater social intelligence predicted more satisfied parishioners.

All these studies were based on the Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (ESCI), verify this effect using other measures to replicate these findings.

Any graduate students out there notion that effective leadership is about having powerful social circuits in the brain has prompted us to extend our concept of emotional intelligence, which we had grounded in theories of individual psychology. A more relationship-based construct for assessing leadership is *social intelligence*, which is define as a set of interpersonal competencies built on specific neural circuits (and related endocrine systems) that inspire others to be effective.

The idea that leaders need social skills is not new, of course. In 1920, Columbia University psychologist Edward Thorndike pointed out that "the best mechanic in a factory may fail as a foreman for lack of social intelligence." More recently, Claudio Fernández-Aráoz found in an analysis of new C-level executives that those who had been hired for their self-discipline, drive, and intellect were sometimes later fired for lacking basic social skills. In other words, the people Fernández-Aráoz studied had smarts in spades, but their inability to get along socially on the job was professionally self-defeating.

Measuring Social Intelligence

Good way to measure Social IQ is to use the basic IQ system, adapted for social skills. Most people have social IQ's from 85-115, but many exceed these limits. People with social IQ's below 80 may show symptoms of autism spectrum disorders such as Asperger's Syndrome and have trouble with making friends, and with communication, and might need some social skill training or extra support from specialists. People with social IQ's over 120 are considered very socially skilled and well adjusted and will work well with very social jobs such as social work, education, and law enforcement.

Researches in Social Intelligence

Psychotherapy often involves helping people to modify their patterns of social intelligence, particularly those that cause them problems in their interpersonal relations. Some efforts are also underway to use computer-based interventions to help people develop their own social intelligence. Paul Ekman, for example, has created the Micro Expression Training Tool, to allow people to practice identifying the brief emotional expressions that flit across people's faces. The website MindHabits.com offers a research-based software programme with which people learn to modify their mind habits, focusing attention on positive social feedback and inhibiting attention to the social threats and rejections that can cause stress. Other interventions, for example to help autistic individuals develop social perception and interaction skills, are also in development. As psychologists are fond of saying, further research is needed to answer many questions related to social intelligence.

However, we can hope that future research on social intelligence will have a different character than it has had in the past.

Artificial Social Intelligence

Sociologists have begun to explore the gains for theory and research that might be achieved by artificial intelligence technology: symbolic processors, expert systems, neural networks, genetic algorithms, and classifier systems. The first major accomplishments of artificial social intelligence (ASI) have been in the realm of theory, where these techniques have inspired new theories as well as helping to render existing theories more rigorous. Two application areas for which ASI holds great promise are the sociological analysis of written texts and data retrieval from the forthcoming Global Information Infrastructure. ASI has already been applied to some kinds of statistical analysis, but how competitive it will be with more conventional techniques remains unclear. To take advantage of the opportunities offered by ASI, sociologists will have to become more computer literate and will have to reconsider the place of programming and computer science in the sociological curriculum. ASI may be a revolutionary approach with the potential to rescue sociology from the period of stagnation into which some observers believe it has fallen.

Conclusion

People who have a highly developed sense of social intelligence have more friends, better relationships, more successful careers and happier lives than those who lack those skills. In recent years SI has been the subject of intense research interest and researchers are reporting many intriguing findings. This is an exciting and promising area of research, but it is still in its infancy. The research results have not yet charted the utility and limits of SI for understanding human behavior.

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