

Social Intelligence: The New Science of Success

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"You're wrong. You're dead wrong, and I'll tell you why."

That statement, and a few others that came after it, may have caused the loss of several million dollars worth of business for a company I was employed with many years ago.

The person on the receiving end was a high-ranking civilian technical expert working for the US Department of Defense. The person on the delivering end was an associate of mine, Jack, (not his real name) a young man with considerable technical knowledge but few discernible social skills.

He and I were meeting with the government expert for the first time. Our mission was to begin building a relationship that would enable us to acquaint him and his colleagues with our technical capabilities as a firm, and by that means create a competitive advantage for our firm as a contractor for Defense business.

The government expert had just voiced a rather strong - and largely unsupportable - opinion about the future prospects of a particular type of technology. My colleague Jack, apparently blind to the larger context for the conversation, could not let this act of technical blasphemy go unanswered. He had to set this man straight. In short order, they were engaged in a heated debate.

Far from achieving our objective of building a basis for a mutually respectful relationship, we were rapidly achieving exactly the opposite. Before I was able to shift the discussion back to neutral ground, the damage had been done. We never succeeded in getting another meeting with him or any of his colleagues.

IQ is Not Enough

I eventually came to understand that my colleague Jack was well supplied with abstract intelligence - the "IQ" kind - but short on **social intelligence**.

Over the course of more than two decades since this enlightening episode, I've been fascinated to observe the differences in the ways people manage the interpersonal experience. I gradually came to believe that this ability to "get along with people" represents a kind of "intelligence" in itself, quite apart from the usual "IQ" intelligence that academics, psychologists and educators have studied so diligently. I began studying this set of competencies, trying to discern or create a coherent framework for describing it, observing it and - most importantly - developing it if possible.

My first priority, selfishly, was to understand my own capacity for connecting with and influencing people, and to learn ways to do it better. Aside from that, however, it was always very clear that some sort of descriptive model of social competence could be a useful resource in various aspects of human development.

The concept of social intelligence as one of a set of key life competencies is surely an idea whose time has arrived. It crystallizes much of what we know about an important dimension of human effectiveness.

Multiple Intelligences

"SI" is perhaps best understood as one of a whole range of interwoven competencies. For some years now, Harvard Professor Howard Gardner has been preaching the idea that human intelligence is not a single trait, as the devotees of the IQ cult have always claimed. According to Gardner, we humans have seven or eight distinct intelligences, or primary dimensions of competence. Even the public education establishment has come to accept Gardner's view, at least in principle. How well they apply the concept to educational design remains an open question.

With due regard to Professor Gardner's contributions, and also with an eye toward making the "MI" concept accessible beyond the academic realm, it's time for us to officially recognize it and bring it into our everyday consciousness.

The first step in understanding social intelligence is to place it into the context of Gardner's MI categories. While Gardner uses rather scientific sounding labels for his categories - verbal-logical, mathematical-symbolic, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and musical - we probably do little harm by recoding them into street language and simplifying them conceptually. Indeed, Gardner has recently been toying with additional categories which make his model a bit more arcane. For our purposes, we can settle on a distilled version of his admirable theory.

I've found it helpful to rearrange Gardner's "multiple smarts" into **six primary categories**:

	Category	Description
A	Abstract Intelligence	Symbolic reasoning
S	Social Intelligence	Dealing with people
P	Practical Intelligence	Getting things done
E	Emotional Intelligence	Self-awareness and self-management
A	Aesthetic Intelligence	Sense of form, design, music, art and literature
K	Kinesthetic Intelligence	Whole-body skills like sports, dance or flying a jet fighter

Others could argue for a somewhat different set of subdivisions, but these six categories work fairly well, and they have the modest extra advantage of spelling out a memorable acronym: **A.S.P.E.A.K.**

We might think of these six basic intelligences as like the six faces of a cube - each

positioned at angles to the others and all coming together to form a whole. Surely the "renaissance human," the success model most of us admire, would have a strong and well-integrated combination of all six intelligences.

Presumably, we could approach each of the six key dimensions as a learning adventure in and of itself. The evidence from developmental research suggests that the basis for each of the six intelligences takes shape early in life. We know less - actually, very little - about whether adults can make significant gains in these dimensions. Certainly the hope for that possibility appeals to many of us.

In recent years, another Harvard professor, Daniel Goleman, has given credence to the developmental possibilities for the MI model, with his book Emotional Intelligence: Why It May Be More Important than IQ. The growing acceptance of "EI," or "EQ" as some fans prefer to call it, has legitimized the notion of an intelligence as a dimension of competence which people can study, think about, learn about and improve.

Considered together, Professor Gardner, Professor Goleman and other contributors to the MI and EI models have done a great service - notably by legitimizing the concept of MI, and also by inviting our attention to the other dimensions.

Next at Bat: Social Intelligence

If we can construct a model for describing, assessing and developing social intelligence, or "SI," then we can add another important piece to the MI model.

We can characterize SI as a combination of a basic understanding of people - a kind of strategic social awareness - and a set of skills for interacting successfully with them. A simple description of SI is:

... the ability to get along well with others and to get them to cooperate with you.

A careful review of social science research findings, ranging from Gardner and Goleman to Dale Carnegie, suggests five key dimensions as a descriptive framework for SI:

	Skill Dimension	Involves
1	Situational Radar (Awareness)	The ability to "read" situations, understand the social context that influences behavior, and choose behavioral strategies that are most likely to be
2	Presence	Also known as "bearing," presence is the external sense of one's self that others perceive: confidence, self-respect and self-worth.
3	Authenticity	The opposite of being "phony," authenticity is a way of behaving which engenders a perception that one is honest with one's self as well as others.
4	Clarity	The ability to express one's self clearly, use language effectively, explain concepts clearly and persuade with ideas.

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5	Empathy	More than just an internal sense of relatedness or appreciation for the experiences of others, empathy in this context represents the ability to create a sense of connectedness with others; to get them on your wavelength and invite them to move with and toward you rather than away and against you.

Those who like acronyms may find that the initials of these five factors - **"S.P.A.C.E."** - form a useful construct: the ability to understand the social space and navigate effectively within it. This SPACE formula immediately suggests the possibility of describing, assessing and developing social intelligence in terms of observable behaviors. Each of the five dimensions can be deconstructed into a set of representative behaviors that may range from highly ineffective to highly effective.

Toxic or Nourishing?

Another personal experience, also more than a decade ago, finally brought the concept of SI, as a behavioral proposition, into focus for me. I had been teaching a series of management seminars for a university extension program in northern California. The program ran for five consecutive week-ends, each with a Friday evening session and an all-day Saturday session. The same managers attended all sessions.

During the first session I introduced a self-assessment questionnaire I had drafted as an attempt to profile behaviors that contributed to alienation, conflict and animosity, in contrast to behaviors that led to empathy, understanding and cooperation. I also introduced the terms "toxic" and "nourishing," respectively, to denote the contrast between the two.

Toxic behaviors, by this definition, are those which cause others to feel devalued, inadequate, angry, frustrated or guilty. Nourishing behaviors cause others to feel valued, capable, loved, respected and appreciated. People with high social intelligence - those who are primarily nourishing in their behavior - are magnetic to others. People with low social intelligence - those who are primarily toxic to others - are anti-magnetic. In this regard, the old expressions about having "a magnetic personality" may be fairly accurate.

During the session, the managers filled out the draft questionnaire and scored it. Most of them reported that the profile was personally useful, particularly in that it gave them a specific set of behaviors to think about.

At the next session one of the managers offered to share an experience he'd had during the intervening week. "I have one particular employee who's very toxic in almost all of his interactions with others. I've been urged to fire him many times. I haven't been able to figure out what to do with him, until now."

"Last Monday after our meeting I invited him to sit down with me and I showed him

this questionnaire. I just said 'I've been taking a management course, and the instructor gave us a questionnaire that I thought was kind of interesting. I'd like to ask you to read it.'"

"I sat there without saying a word while he read the list of toxic and nourishing behaviors. When he got to the bottom, he looked up at me. He said 'This is me, isn't it? All of the things on the toxic side are the things I've been doing. I never really thought about it this way.'"

"I only said one thing to him: 'Maybe it's something you want to consider.'"

"Well, I've never seen someone's behavior change so fast in my whole life. From one day to the next, he went from the complete grouch to being helpful, considerate, and even friendly. His co-workers keep asking me 'What did you do to him? Did you inject him with something? Did you send him off to therapy? Suddenly he's become Mr. Personality.'"

Many times since that episode I've seen convincing evidence that the biggest single cause of low social intelligence is simple lack of insight. Toxic people are very often so preoccupied with their own personal struggles that they simply do not understand the impact they have on others. They need help in seeing themselves as others see them.

Social Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence

Fans of emotional intelligence have long attempted to incorporate interpersonal skills within the conceptual envelope of EI, on the premise that one's interior experience forms the basis for one's interactions. This seems to be only partly true, however. With the clear recognition of social intelligence as a separate dimension of competence, the relationship between EI and SI is now becoming clearer.

Case in point: Ronald Reagan, particularly while he served as President of the United States, engendered an unusual degree of affection in the hearts of many Americans, and even people in other countries. After he left office, and even during his declining health and eventual death, the sense of affection felt by many toward him only grew. His funeral ceremonies were accompanied by a remarkable outpouring of admiration; most of the American press and media coverage presented him as a lovable father-figure and compassionate leader. To the disgruntlement of many who disagreed with his politics, he was even elevated to the stature of a heroic leader.

Yet, even Reagan's most devoted associates readily acknowledged the paradoxical contradiction between his emotional and social personas. Skillful, on one hand, at charming and motivating people - individually and collectively - Reagan was a man whom very few people knew well or connected with on a deeply personal level. His relationships with close family members were generally distant and strained. People who worked closely with him on a daily basis reported that he showed very little interest in them as individuals. One of his biographers reported hearing exactly the same stories many times, told in exactly the same way - the same words, the voice cadence, the pauses, the gestures and facial expressions.

Based on these observations, it seems reasonable to characterize Reagan as a man of remarkably high social intelligence - at least by any reasonable behavioral definition -

and distinctly low emotional intelligence. Clearly, while EI and SI are closely interwoven, they do not seem to be the same thing.

A Learnable Skill

We seem well overdue to make SI a developmental priority in our early education, public schooling, adult learning processes and in business. Children and teen-agers need to learn to win the fellowship and respect they crave. College students need to learn to collaborate and influence others effectively. Managers need to understand and connect with the people they're appointed to lead. High-tech professionals like Jack need to understand the social context and achieve their objectives by working from empathy. All adults, in their careers and personal lives, need to be able to present themselves effectively and earn the respect of those they deal with. Social intelligence can reduce conflict, create collaboration, replace bigotry and polarization with understanding, and mobilize people toward common goals. Indeed, it may be - in the long run - the most important ingredient in our survival as a species.

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Dr. Karl Albrecht is a management consultant, futurist, speaker, and a prolific author. As chairman of Karl Albrecht International, he oversees the practical application of his concepts through a consulting firm, a training firm and a publishing company. He has written more than 20 books on organizational and personal effectiveness. He is the author of the best-selling book *Brain Power: Learn to Develop Your Thinking Skills*, as well as the creator of the popular "Brain Power Course," marketed by the American Management Association and sponsors in various countries outside the US. His other books include the best-sellers *Service America!: Doing Business in the New Economy*, *The Only Thing That Matters: Bringing the Power of the Customer Into the Center of Your Business*, *The Northbound Train: Finding the Purpose, Setting the Direction, Shaping the Destiny of Your Organization*, and *The Power of Minds at Work: Organizational Intelligence in Action*. His most recent book, on which this article is based, is *Social Intelligence: the New Science of Success*. KAI publishes the [Social Intelligence Profile](#), a self-assessment questionnaire instrument for measuring SI skills, as well as the [Mindex Thinking Style Profile](#).