



Multiple intelligences and minds as attributes to reconfigure PR—A critical analysis



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ABSTRACT

The fields of business and management with which public relations interacts and in which it is often located are rife with concepts, models and theories on leadership, performance, and effectiveness. Recently, these have turned attention to alleged multiple forms of intelligence, such as Howard Gardner's claims for eight types of intelligence, which have been expanded by others to as many as 150. Gardner also proposed that humans have five minds and claimed that application of these diverse intelligences and minds can enhance human interactions and relationships. This article critically reviews the potential of these concepts and theories to reconfigure PR, identifying some useful insights, but also raising fundamental theoretical questions.

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1. General understandings of intelligence

Typical dictionary definitions of intelligence describe it as:

1. The ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations; the skilled use of reason.
2. The ability to apply knowledge to manipulate one's environment or to think abstractly as measured by objective criteria or tests (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

Scholarly definitions of what they call 'general intelligence' include Schmidt and Hunter's (2000) description of it as the ability to learn and solve problems. Gardner and Hatch similarly define human intelligence as "the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting" (1989, p. 5). Resnik (2002) also refers to learning, and an ability to apply "reason" appears in many discussions of intelligence (e.g., Cismaru & Chiochina, 2014, p. 4). In summary, these and other common definitions associate intelligence with *learning* and *applying knowledge*; with dealing with *new situations*; with *understanding*; and particularly with applying *reason* and *thinking abstractly* with a view to *solving problems*.

While the key concepts identified in these definitions are useful in disrupting populist notions of intelligence – that is, intelligence is not simply about brain cells or something innate that we are born with at a fixed level, but rather it is created through learning, gaining knowledge, and practicing to gain abilities – there are elements of these common definitions that are troubling and warrant challenge. The first is the focus on reason and objective criteria, which implies

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a *logico-deductive scientific* approach and *positivist* or *post-positivist* thinking informed by quantitative research methods. Postmodern researchers argue that humans are *interpretivist* and *constructivist* and that their perceptions and behaviors are influenced by *affective* as well as rational *cognitive* processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Beyond mechanistic and systems thinking, Shockey-Zalabak (1994) argues that “interpretative-symbolic-culture” orientated approaches need to be applied to communication (pp. 3–5). In short, the human mind is essentially *humanistic* as well as capable of *scientific* processes. Also, the focus on solving problems suggests a functionalist view sociologically and in organizational contexts and an implicit objective of effectiveness which, in the face of inequities in power and neoliberal capitalist thinking, can result in intelligence being used to manipulate one’s environment and fashion products in socially inequitable and undesirable ways. But such concerns have been overtaken by a number of new theories and arguments about intelligence that raise new notions, possibilities, and questions.

2. The alleged discovery of multiple intelligences

2.1. Emotional intelligence

Perhaps the traditional rational, objective, scientifically orientated understanding of human intelligence is the reason that some psychologists, including a few ‘pop psychologists’, have proposed *emotional intelligence* as a way of thinking and applying our intellect. Abbreviated to EI, the concept is more often referred to as EQ following the tradition of measuring intelligence using tests that calculate an intelligence quotient (IQ). Mayer and Salovey, who coined the term ‘emotional intelligence’ in the 1990s, define EQ as “the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth” (1997, p. 10). Here, we have recognition that being smart is not just about logic, reason, and science.

Two types of EQ are proposed: (a) *trait* based emotional intelligence and (b) *ability* orientated emotional intelligence. Soviet-born British psychologist Konstantin Petrides who advocated a distinction between the ability based model and a trait based model has developed and advocated the latter concept over many years. He argues that Trait EQ is “a constellation of emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality” (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Trait EQ refers to an individual’s self-perceptions of their emotional abilities and is measured by self-reporting, whereas Ability EQ is based on demonstrated abilities.

Trait EQ seems to take us back to the ‘nature versus nurture’ argument and specifically to the much-criticized view that intelligence is entirely in our genes, which led to the Modernist notion of the born genius. On the other hand, Ability EQ proposes five learned abilities: (a) “self-awareness” which Eysenck says is the “keystone of emotional intelligence”; (b) managing one’s emotions; (c) “marshaling emotions in the service of a goal”, which could be termed motivating oneself; (d) recognizing emotions in others; and (e) handling relationships by managing emotions in others sensitively and effectively (Eysenck, 2000; p. 109). While these are all eminently supportable principles, even commonsensical, they beg the question ‘why not simply call them abilities rather than refer to them as new types of intelligence?’ A number of scholars have asked this question, as we will see.

Goleman (1998) proposed a ‘mixed model’ of EQ that focuses on a wide array of competencies and skills allegedly associated with leadership and performance including self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills to motivate people in desired ways, empathy, and motivation, and he played a key role in making emotional intelligence a popular concept in management.

However, in concert with a number of scholars who criticize the concept of emotional intelligence, Eysenck (2000) says that Goleman’s description of EQ contains unsubstantiated assumptions about intelligence and that it lacks any scientific basis. He states that Goleman:

exemplifies more clearly than most the fundamental absurdity of the tendency to class almost any type of behavior as an ‘intelligence’ ... If these five ‘abilities’ define ‘emotional intelligence’, we would expect some evidence that they are highly correlated; Goleman admits that they might be quite uncorrelated, and in any case if we cannot measure them, how do we know they are related? So the whole theory is built on quicksand: there is no sound scientific basis (Eysenck, 2000; p. 109).

In his book titled *Psychobabble: Exploding the Myths of the Self-help Generation*, Briers (2012) points out that Salovey and Mayer (1989) were quite circumspect in their original definition of emotional intelligence. Briers says that in their view, emotional intelligence resembled other forms of intelligence, or even was the same thing, and that it “was distinguished chiefly by the specific type of data upon which it operated” (n.p.). In short, it was intelligence that considered emotions as well as logic and reason.

In a similar critique, Locke (2005) says that what is described is not another form or type of intelligence, but simply intelligence applied to a particular life domain. He suggests the concept should be re-labeled and referred to as a *skill*. Or we can simply refer to these humanistic elements as abilities that complement other abilities based on scientific processes. Nevertheless, the belief in multiple forms of intelligence has persisted through the 20th century and into the 21st century.

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