What is all this emotional intelligence stuff all about?

The challenge of organisational autism ©

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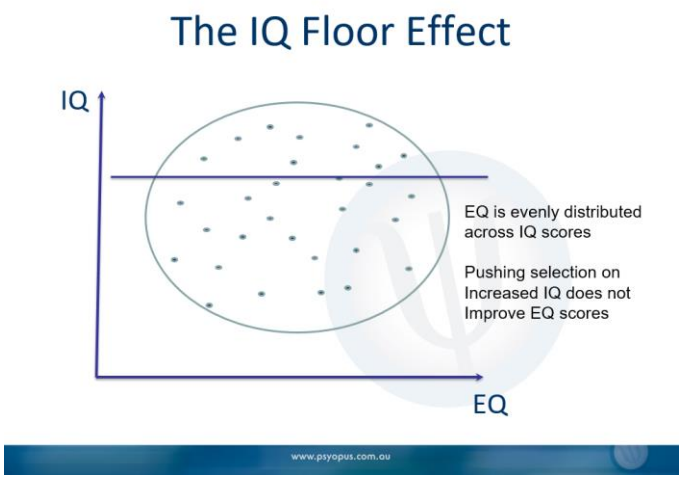
IQ vs EQ

Psychologists over the past century have been pretty good at measuring what is known as "crystallised intelligence". Crystallised intelligence is simply the cognitive capacity of an individual to solve certain mental tasks whether they be numerical calculations, spacial object rotation or word recognition or sentence comprehension – we calculate these performance scores into an *Intelligence Quotient* or IQ. We have managed to use fancy structural invariance modelling to prove that IQ and its structural form is consistent across gender and cultures. We even have used fancier prediction models to determine the success of performance based upon the IQ scores of individuals and we now know that some 50% of the variance of your IQ score can be explained by genetics. Despite all these fancy psychometrics, some researchers believe that the predictive power of IQ in measures of organisational success, is about 4% of the variance explained in outcome performance! So how does 96% of the variance go unexplained?

The IQ Floor Effect

Researchers like Coleman (1995) argue that IQ has a floor effect. What this means is that IQ scores are not necessarily associated with the "skills of emotional intelligence" like self-mastery, managing emotions and delayed gratification. In some instances, depending on life circumstances IQ and EQ scores can be orthogonal to each other, meaning that increased IQ scores does not lead to improved EQ providing a floor effect. This may not matter where problems in the organisation are purely technical but having worked for some 20 years as an organisational psychologist, complex problems within organisations are rarely if ever just technical problems.

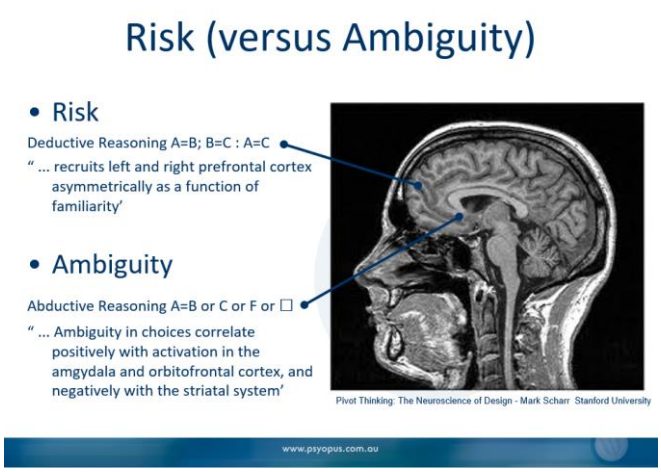


The "smart dumb guy"

My colleague Paul Culmsee describes that people in organisations who are highly cognitively intelligent and lack strong social skills and emotional regulation are "the smart dumb guys". Have you met any of these people in your work – could you be one of them perhaps? This is the floor effect that Coleman speaks of – that is where organisations select almost exclusively on cognitive intelligence (IQ) but ignore the importance of the social and emotional world in which problems and decisions are made. One of my first jobs as an organisational psychologist was to explore the selection system of fire fighters. To weed out candidates from a large selection pool they used basic IQ tests and selected the top 5% of candidates to move to the next round of the selection process. This is a pushed selection process, since IQ tests are cheap to implement but in a large selection pool you push up IQ but may not be selecting for more criterion related measures like tolerance with boredom, height anxiety and claustrophobia. By inverting the selection process to physical characteristics and emotional regulation we could inject more variability in the IQ range which stopped selecting University graduates in a job that can often be cognitively under stimulating at the best of times. This is not to say that fire fighters need not be intelligent – they certainly do – but other forms of intelligence are required other than pure academic achievement.

Sometimes you can find the smart dumb guy in academia – highly intelligent people who may have difficulty in contextualising information and taking into consideration emotional and intuitive aspects of

decision making that involves both the frontal lobes of the brain and more primitive parts including the orbitofrontal cortex and that tricky part called the amygdala (more on him later). Indeed, there is increasing research that shows that both deductive and abductive reasoning is essential in good decision making.



As mentioned in other papers and indeed throughout my online program on Creating Collaborative Leaders: http://psyopus.teachable.com/courses/

the essential skills to collaboration is both pattern recognition and ambiguity tolerance. In other words, with complex wicked problems anxiety comes for free. How we negotiate the ambiguity of competing problems and solutions with partial knowledge is determined very much to the degree we can tolerate unknowing and incompleteness of information. Seeing the pattern in complex problems is much an emotional skill as it is a cognitive skill. If we try to shut down emergent solutions too early to reduce our anxiety and not to solve the problem, we could be responding to an overwhelmed amygdala!

The amygdala highjack and other strange similes

I am somewhat sceptical of fashionable neuroscience to explain everything about behaviour and decisions and often ignoring intentionality. Not the least that some researchers argue that where we are overwhelmed by our emotional response to things our amygdala *highjacks* the pre-frontal cortex where reasoning and rational thought reside. Be that as it may, there is some legitimacy that these more primal parts of the brain are activated when we are overwhelmed with emotion.

Who's in charge?

I prefer a much subtler and more complex explanation from the wonderful work of Iain McGilchrist is his stunning work *The Master and His Emissary*. He argues that since the Enlightenment we have allowed the left part of our brain the *emissary* to take over the right hemisphere which is the *master* in our decision making. The right hemisphere handles important skills like metaphor, music, imagination, poetry and even faith. This left-brain takeover is like as one writer argued occurs when the bean-counters take over the business. It is important that beans are counted, of course, but the counting of beans must serve a higher purpose for any organisation to be sustainable (sorry bean counters).

The emergence of organisational autism

This argument of McGilchrist has led me to the concerns that our organisations are becoming increasingly autistic. I don't mean this in a literal or pejorative sense, but as a metaphor for our times. We seem to continue to select, recruit, reward and enable cold reasoning and hard facts more as a social value of the appearance of rationality than to recognise and consider that the other 96% of organisational performance lies elsewhere than in our cognitive capacity to analyse the data. We live in a time where the Emissary has bound up the Master's skills of intuition, imagination and pattern recognition and relegated these skills to some infantile unrealistic projection of an over emotional response. Our technological age is increasingly willing to hand over our decisions to algorithms and distant IT systems with decision trees in the name of efficiency. Could we be making a world redundant of human emotion in a desire to improve "accuracy" or are we missing out on the very skills we need for the future, these being ambiguity tolerance, civility, reciprocity, intentionality and virtue?

Coleman, D. (1995) *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, Bantam Books*.

McGhilchrist, I. (2009) *The Master and His Emissary: the divided brain and the making of the Western World*. Yale University Press.