

# Looking to a Brighter Future

By Vernon Bryce, Kenexa

This article looks at how the evolution of multiple intelligence theory now promises much for workplace productivity and organizational competitiveness. With World economic pressures bearing down, could the theory's links to talent assessment and organization wide talent audits, carried out through the web, play a role in creating a brighter future?

It is, of course, not a new concept that there is more to life than 'academic intelligence' as the benchmark of people's abilities, and that the concept of 'general intelligence' that lay behind 'IQ' began at the beginning of the last century.

It is more surprising, however, that it took until comparatively recent times—following revolutionary work by Howard Gardner, of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Harvard Project Zero, published in 1983—that IQ theory began to be superseded by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (MI).

Many recent advances in cognitive science, developmental psychology and neuroscience suggest that each individual's level of 'intelligence' is essentially comprised of autonomous faculties that can work individually or in concert with other faculties. Originally, Gardner identified seven such faculties, which back then he defined as 'intelligences':

- *Kinaesthetic/Bodily*: Of all of the intelligences, this is one that is most taken-for-granted as part of our lives. This is most easily seen in highly trained sports people and other performance roles such as dance. We perform a broad range of complex bodily/kinaesthetic tasks in everyday life, usually without giving them a second thought. This intelligence reflects the full range of movement that is possible in and throughout one's body—including facial expressions, posture, and language.
- *Musical*: This relates to the sound and vibration from the natural and/or human environment. These include machines, those from musical and percussion instruments, and those produced by human vocal chords.

- *Linguistic*: This involves all forms of language use and is one of the underpinnings of our current education system.
- *Mathematical/Logical*: This is pattern-seeking intelligence that, as it evolves, becomes ever more abstract.
- *Spatial*: This deals with everything we see—all conceivable shapes/forms, patterns and designs, concrete and abstract images, and the entire spectrum of colour and texture. Spatial things are not only those in the real, external world, which we observe through our eyes, but also those buried in the recesses of one's imagination where we perceive things through our "mind's eye." This includes our capacities to visualize and dream about the possible; the fantastical and to create/invent totally new things.
- *Interpersonal*: This involves human relationships, the collaboration with others, and learning from and about other people.
- *Intrapersonal*: This includes one's ability for self-reflection, and therein being in touch with the inner world of our individual being.

Recently, Gardner added an eighth intelligence to this list:

- *Naturalist*: This is related to our recognition, appreciation and understanding of the natural world around us. It involves such capacities as the discernment of species and discrimination, the ability to recognize and classify various flora and fauna, and our knowledge of and communion with the natural world.

There has been some discussion about a ninth intelligence—existential intelligence.

The current thinking theorizes that everyone has some degree of each of these intelligences. In what proportions these exist and how best to use that knowledge in the workplace, from a management perspective are the critical questions, of course.

It is in the workplace that the potential usefulness and impact of the MI concept is greatest. If one could understand and then exploit multiple intelligences to the full, then one could argue that this would have a knock on affect on productivity and therein an organization's competitiveness. With recent world economic stresses dictating much current corporate policy and strategy—the concept of increasing productivity of the existing workforce, whilst highlighting areas where the organization is urgently lacking—has been thrust to the forefront. So it is interesting that many researchers are now supporting the potential of MI.

In support of the view that there are Multiple Intelligences at play, Dr. Richard Harding, an experienced assessment researcher, commented: "How else can we explain that some of us have a desire to learn mainly through pictures, while others use and choose mainly words. Is it fair to use a word test in isolation if we wanted to see how 'bright' somebody is?"

Philosopher and sports psychologist, Friedrich Kirchner illustrated the concept of MI by stating, "...as sports fans, we can watch a football or rugby match and see players perform with incredible perception and accuracy on the pitch, but struggle with the most simplistic verbal recall constructs when re-living the move in the post match TV interview."

So ultimately, the implications of 'MI' for individuals and organizations alike are tremendous. Productivity, learning, selection, group working, project teams, career choice and innovation, among many other activities, could change significantly in the light of the MI theory. Applying this theory could lead to each of us having our working lives transformed into much richer and diverse experiences for ourselves, our families and our customers. It's potentially a win-win situation. It may sound like a wish list world come true, but the impact for industry and concepts such as labor relations are great.

At this point, another related concept becomes relevant here too—the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI). 'Emotional Intelligence', published in 1995, argues that human competencies such as self-awareness, self-discipline, persistence and empathy are of greater consequence than IQ in much of life, and that children can and should be taught to develop these abilities. Dr. Goleman was a co-founder of the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning at the Yale University Child Studies Center (now at the University of Illinois at Chicago), with the aim of helping schools and educational establishments introduce emotional literacy courses.

Then his later book, 'Working With Emotional Intelligence' (1998), stressed that workplace competencies based on Emotional Intelligence (EI) play a far more significant role in star performance than do intellect or technical skill, and that both individuals and companies will benefit from developing and cultivating these capabilities.

For whilst Goleman does not denigrate the importance of IQ, he feels that it is not the only measure of what it takes to be 'smart and/or successful'. In Goleman's view, EI—which involves emotional balance, persistence, motivation, empathy and social finesse—is an essential predictor of success in life. Although it is primarily shaped by childhood experience, EI can be improved and thus developed by learning throughout life.

He has also has been quoted as saying: "EI is a different way of being smart. It includes knowing what your feelings are and using your feelings to make good decisions in life. It's being able to manage distressing moods well and control impulses. It's being motivated and remaining hopeful and optimistic when you have setbacks in working toward goals. It's empathy, knowing what the people around you are feeling, and it's social skill—getting along well with other people, managing emotions in relationships, being able to persuade or lead others.

"IQ contributes, at best, about 20 percent to the factors that determine life success. That leaves 80 percent to everything else. There are many ways in which your destiny in life depends on having the skills that make up EI."

Gardner predicts that MI will create new opportunities for all. Once we identify our own strengths in these 'new' areas we should now stop asking 'how intelligent are we?' and instead start asking 'where are we intelligent then?' This should help us to better discover our strengths.

Looking ahead, one could argue therefore, that the advent of MI and EI would generate new challenges for both line managers and board members. These include how to change recruitment and selection criteria to take account of an individual's MI and EI, rather than rely purely on the results of linguistic and interpersonal assessments, and how to tailor roles and jobs to MI-related 'talent maps', which would be derived from traits set out in an employee's skills portfolio.

It is the Internet that comes to the rescue as the facilitator, since online, talent-based population psychometrics will be by far the quickest way to identify what individuals need in order to develop and use their skills in the most effective ways.

Moreover, these online assessments will give employers valuable insights into the management styles they need to adopt in order to get the most effective response from their workforce. Many enlightened organizations are now carrying out organization-wide talent audits, mainly using the web for speed of collection and processing. They are then interpreting these results and using them as part of a change management strategy. In doing so, they aim to transform their productivity and competitiveness. It would appear to be a successful approach as policy is geared to talent, be it existing or required.

But beyond this, the exploitation of MI also offers us all a real chance to release innovation and to create genuine empowerment at work. As new roles emerge and are defined, new energies will be encouraged and therein engaged to give each of us a personal career edge. We will need to view such things as recruitment advertising, selection, learning and development at work as never before and that will require some “intelligent” decisions by talented people. ■

### **About the Author**

#### **Vernon Bryce, M.Sc.**

Vernon Bryce, M.Sc., is managing partner of Kenexa’s European operations. Mr. Bryce has extensive expertise in organizational assessment and development, TQM solutions, leadership development, executive coaching and change management. He has worked for more than 30 years in senior human resource executive, behavioral science consulting and business school teaching roles, and has consulted for a wide range of businesses in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. As a specialist in talent management, assessment and engagement survey solutions for Kenexa, Bryce supports several international research and consulting programs. He has published short articles on HRM and HCM.

Mr. Bryce is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist. He holds an intercollegiate Masters degree in psychology from University College London, a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology from Exeter University and a Diploma in Business Administration from Aston University Business School.

[www.kenexa.com](http://www.kenexa.com)  
866.391.9557