

Can the concept of multiple intelligences be applied to enhance the productivity of managers?

Multiple Intelligences (MI) is a highly productive tool in the hands of managers in small and large organisations. Gardner (1983) first proposed the MI theory in education, and realised a wider application. Checkley (1997) quoted him *"Where I've changed much more, I believe, is at the workplace. I direct research projects and work with all kinds of people. Probably 10 to 15 years ago, I would have tried to find people who were just like me to work with me on these projects. I've really changed my attitude a lot on that score. Now I think much more in terms of what people are good at and in putting together teams of people whose varying strengths complement one another."*

MI theory gives a manager a broader framework to understand the perception, capabilities and motivations of those he manages. People with differing MI's will see the world differently, are able to do different things and are motivated differently. For example, a person with a high "interpersonal intelligence" may respond primarily to how a decision affects the people involved. They will be able to "knit" the team together and will be motivated by the team dynamics of projects even over the outcomes. So a manager who understands MI will have an increased understanding of how to relate to people on the basis of the MI that a person has.

A manager can bring a higher level of motivation to a person by highlighting privately and publicly the MI's they have. Managers typically understand people in a framework of their IQ, EQ and personality type alone. Although these are helpful, understanding MI will add to a managers understanding of the strengths of those he manages. If a person feels valued for their strengths, they will be more highly motivated. A manager can also help to create respect in the team by educating team members about MI, particularly regarding the MI's of fellow team members. With increased understanding of others comes increased respect, and the team will function more smoothly. A manager can also give greater importance to the opinion of team members when the issue at hand involves the MI that the team member has strength in. In that way, the team can make better collective decisions.

A manager with an understanding of MI will be able to place employees in the right job. Job prerequisites may be able to redefined in terms of MI's, and people who are lacking in a particular MI that is necessary for a job may be able to be trained in that MI or be assisted by someone with that MI. A manager can also redeploy an employee to a job whose requirements are more co-incident with their MI's.

Following on from the above, MI's can be used as a framework for team formation. When a manager is forming a team, he may first of all decide what intelligences the team needs to achieve its project, and select team members that collectively have those MI's. Belbin (1996) proposed nine team roles that have some similarity to MI's, but MI's may potentially be a better framework in certain instances. A manager may also conclude that their company does not have the necessary intelligences to achieve its aims. He may then consider to hire new people, partner with another organisation or design a system where customers can provide the intelligence via a co-creation system. A manager with an understanding of the MI's of those he manages will be able to tailor his training and development plan. For example, a person with spatial intelligence will learn easier when video clips, photographs and models are used. This concept was expanded with examples of possible training for the different intelligences by Weller (1999). He wrote that *"The goal of the trainer is to provide each learner with initial activities for instruction on the training topic which have been geared toward the preferred intelligence(s)."*

The MI framework can be helpful to a manager in understanding the effect of their particular leadership style. Goleman (2000) used the "Emotional Intelligence" (EI) framework and developed a tool that links leadership style to the working climate of an organization. The EI capabilities of "self-awareness" and "self-management" fit into the MI of "intrapersonal intelligence" and the EI capabilities of "social awareness" and "social skill" fit into the MI of "interpersonal intelligence". In the same way as Goleman used EI in redefining leadership, we can extend the leadership framework to the other six MI's to make a more complete understanding of leadership and its impact on working climate.

References

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