

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION – ADDING A ‘THIRD’ DIMENSION¹

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We live in a knowledge society which requires us to acquire knowledge in order to be able to solve the problems ahead of us. We certainly learn a lot and we sometimes learn how to apply our knowledge to given problems. However, we still seem to fail at an astonishing rate, given the increasing amount of knowledge that has been collected. We seem to continuously create new problems while solving others. Complexity of life appears to go beyond the problem-solving knowledge we tend to apply. Increasing uncertainty calls for creating a meaningful future by wisely accepting our ignorance without losing confidence in what we do know and by acting accordingly.

This article suggests a change of approach to higher education away from the focus on more expertise and knowledge to the ability to discover meaning in what we do and to jointly create a meaningful future. This will be based on a three-dimensional approach to knowledge and human intelligence.

Approaches to knowledge - Concepts of Intelligence

Introduced almost 100 years ago, the concept of “intelligence” started decades of psychological research about cognitive skills and the development of numerous testing tools. In 1995 Daniel Goleman presented his wide-spread concept of “emotional intelligence” and the importance of feelings for high performance in the work environment. Finally, in 2001, Zohar and Marshall argued that “spiritual intelligence” is the third and “ultimate intelligence,” which we use to discover values and find meaning, a main motif of human action.

“Cognitive” Intelligence – Know how

Quantifying intellectual capabilities began with research on and application of intelligence testing. Diagnosis of the “intelligence quotient (IQ)” measures the ability to solve logical or strategic problems. The results of the respective diagnostic tools are still used for prognosis of cognitive capabilities and performance in various settings.

The higher the test scores, the higher the “intelligence” of the tested person, is the basic concept of this approach. In fact, studies have shown the significant

¹ This article has been written based on my earlier work on project management knowledge and leadership development (Mengel, 2004, 2006).

relationship between cognitive intelligence and job performance. However, discussions about what set of capabilities should be included and with what weight still go on and a variety of diagnostic tools exist.

“Emotional Intelligence” – Know who

Probably the most influential approach introducing an additional dimension into differentiating between high and low performance in management and leadership was Goleman’s (1995) concept of “Emotional Intelligence” (EI). Goleman has identified the ability to access one’s own and others’ personal feelings as crucial for both the cognitive intelligence to become effective and for achieving high performance in professional settings and work environments.

In his research, Goleman (1995, 2004) has collected and analyzed data from almost 500 global companies in order to identify the factors most influential on the organizations’ performance. His findings confirmed earlier research indicating that in an environment of rather high IQ, technical skills and cognitive capabilities were of rather less significance compared to emotional intelligence factors. Hence, while the IQ seems necessary for professionals to do their job decently, EI competencies and the respective knowledge seem to make them excel.

In particular, Goleman identified the following dimensions generating high-performance: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management. Undoubtedly the capabilities to cope with challenges of one’s own personality as well as the skills to create and sustain buy-in and cooperation are of major importance in any organizational environment. Expertise may help to get professional assignments done. But when it comes to balancing the often conflicting and changing requirements, leaders additionally need EI competencies to meet the expectations of various stakeholders. By incorporating emotions and the management of relationships, this approach goes beyond cognitive intelligence and expertise. It fails, however, to explicitly refer to the human ability and need to strive for values and a meaningful life in spite of or in the midst of increasing uncertainty and complexity.

“Spiritual” Intelligence – Know why

While values and meaning have increasingly come to the forefront of management theory and education, the concept of Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) introduced by Zohar and Marshall (2001) is the first comprehensive model of human intelligence incorporating the human search for values and meaning. SQ helps us “address and solve problems of meaning and value...[It is] the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context, the intelligence with which we can assess that one course of action or one life-path is more meaningful than another” (Zohar & Marshall, 2001, p. 3f).

Viktor E. Frankl (1984), the well-known Viennese psychiatrist and survivor of Nazi concentration camps, has first identified “Man’s Search for Meaning” as

the primary motivation of humans. Zohar and Marshall build on Frankl's research, holding that SQ is the major capability of asking "why" and of answering that question by being able to find meaning in everything we do and experience. Thus, we are also able to question the rules and situations with which we are confronted. Therefore, SQ goes beyond the abilities to intelligently think, feel, act and behave within a situational context or a given framework. SQ allows human beings to wisely reflect on the very situation and frame of reference they find themselves in and creatively and meaningfully transform it into something new and more valuable if they so choose.

Integrating emotional and spiritual intelligence into our cognitive approaches will enable us to move ahead from analysis to synthesis, from breaking down to integrating, from knowing to understanding, from asking "how" to "why". It will help us grow from novice to competent and proficient performers and finally to become leaders who are emotionally and spiritually intelligent and wisely accept their limitations. As leaders we will be capable of leading, creating and transforming our environment rather than reacting to the inevitable changes and challenges facing us. Cognitive approaches will help us identify what is; emotional approaches may provide us with insight as to how people feel about what is and thus help us to intuitively understand the dynamics of where we are going. Finally, the spiritual capabilities may help us grasp new meaningful options of where to go and what to be prepared for.

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