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Beautiful minds often hardest to manage

Author: Fiona Smith
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Does all the talk of 'soft skills' at work mean your IQ is less important? Fiona Smith looks at the problems of managing the very smart employee.

The guy in the corner doing complex calculations in his head and resting his scruffy Hush Puppies on the edge of a desk piled with paper may have the highest IQ in the company. But if he has the emotional intelligence of a gnat, he is rapidly becoming one of the forgotten people.

The rush to embrace emotional intelligence (EQ) in business is leaving behind those with technical brilliance but few social skills.

Where once they might have been welcomed into organisations because of the sheer beauty of their intellect, now they have to fight hard to make it past the psychometric testers looking for "well-rounded" job applicants.

The general view is that, as EQ can be learned, they should shape up or ship out. But this denies the fact that some of these people, who can be incredibly valuable to organisations, will never be able to relate to others or master their own feelings.

These days, while high IQ, low EQ people can be found in many companies, they are unlikely to be leaders because of their difficulty in communicating effectively. They are more likely to be found in highly technical areas and could be actuaries, surgeons, forensic accountants, IT systems architects or scientists.

And while they may be brilliant in their areas, they have to compete with colleagues who win the intelligence "lottery" and have both EQ and IQ.

Founding partner of consultancy Dattner Grant, Fabian Dattner, says research has shown that high IQ is not a predictor of success: "Emotional intelligence is a two to four times higher predictor of success than technical and cognitive skills combined."

She says that filling leadership roles with technically brilliant people who can't relate to those they guide is fraught with danger. And even when they are the ones being led, such people have to be managed very carefully.

Dattner says she consulted to a computer company research and development division where there were 60 people of whom about half were double PhDs.

"They were a very, very clever group of people, but so emotionally destructive and dysfunctional, it was breathtaking," she says." The division got closed down in Australia

because it didn't produce anything commercially valuable. Brilliant, original and unique people, but they just didn't connect. They didn't share information, they didn't work collaboratively."

Such people can be trained to become more emotionally aware, but it's a long haul.

Dattner says: "Having said that, the world will still produce Picassos and Michelangelos, Bachs and Vivaldis. It will still produce genius, but genius in an organisation is a problem . . . [However] you don't want to diminish the gift of genius, because then you are running the risk of dumbing an organisation down."

The Victorian general manager of the Hudson human resource consultancy, Andrew Staite, says the nature of work has changed and has left poor communicators behind.

"Twenty or 30 years ago, most of us could do the bulk of our roles in isolation from other people, but now the nature of work is so much more interdependent and the skills we need to undertake our jobs are much broader, require more finely developed communication skills and a much more sophisticated approach to the way you handle those work interactions," Staite says.

"Technology has enabled much more immediate communication between people. That shift has led to this natural focus on emotional intelligence and, perhaps, some of those people with very high IQ and low EQ and finding it more difficult to get the opportunities or roles they want.

"The way to lead the highly intelligent person is different: you empower that person as much as possible, delegate responsibility, provide them with access to extensive data, give them the opportunity to demonstrate creativity or innovation in what they are doing, allow them to learn at their own pace and absorb information in a way that makes them feel challenged. Where we typically see issues arising is where the individual is bored or not challenged by the person they are reporting to."

Staite says a good manager would also look for ways that the high IQ/low EQ person could share their knowledge.

The most important thing in handling this kind of intelligence is to make the workplace diverse, says Professor **Allan Snyder**, director of the Centre For The Mind research facility in Sydney.

"The best way to have innovation and creativity is to have a number of people from different backgrounds," he says.

"Company directors tend now to have weird backgrounds like anthropology. I think the more diverse mindsets you bring to a table, the better."

Snyder says employers can get the most from their most intelligent workers by encouraging them to take risks and confront conventional wisdom.

"The most important thing I have extracted from all the studies of extraordinary people it isn't that they long for success or have a fear of failure. Rather, they see themselves as different from the rest of the pack, they almost abhor being just average or just normal.

"You have to allow that kind of attitude to percolate through your organisation. These people must have the ticket to be able to confront conventional wisdom. They should be able to feel they don't have to be like other people."

What's the difference?

Intelligence quotient (IQ) is the ratio of intelligence, calculated by dividing an individual's mental age by their chronological age and multiplying by 100. It is a score derived from a set of tests developed to measure cognitive abilities in relation to their age group. Roughly 68 per cent of the population has an IQ between 85 and 115. The "normal" range is between 70 and 130, and contains about 95 per cent of the population. A score below 70 may indicate mental retardation, and a score above 130 may indicate intellectual giftedness. To join Mensa an organisation for people with high IQs you must score within the top 2 per cent in any approved standardised intelligence test. Emotional intelligence (EQ) was a concept appropriated by Daniel Goleman in his book

Emotional Intelligence (Bloomsbury, 1996). Goleman divides emotional intelligence into five competencies:

- * To identify and name one's emotional states and to understand the link between emotions, thought and action.
 - * To manage one's emotional states to control emotions or to shift undesirable emotional states to more adequate ones.
 - * To enter into emotional states associated with a drive to achieve and be successful.
 - * To read, be sensitive to and influence other people's emotions.
 - * To enter and sustain satisfactory interpersonal relationships.
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