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Abstract: Emotional Intelligence has captured both the academic and the popular imagination. In this paper I argue that IR researchers and practitioners need to understand EI as a discursive construct. The thrust of EI is to postulate a postmodern view of both the individual employee and the organisation within which that employee is situated. Even more broadly, EI captures the zeitgeist of fast capitalism in a contemporary global context. As conceived by Salovey and Mayer (1990), EI straddles the discourse of modernity and post modernity. It has residues of techno-cognitive values characteristic of modernity, but it postulates an information processing ontology in keeping with the information technology revolution of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the hands of Goleman (1995, 1998), there is a significant shift to a decentred malleability, or plasticity, that is characteristic of a postmodern sensibility. Goleman's organisational employee is an individual in a continuous process of invention and re-invention. Considered from the perspectives of both HR theory and the workplace agenda of the Howard government, these trends in both the workplace and the broader cultural discourse must be fully understood. The work of Goleman signals a decisive shift in managerial thinking. The task of management is no longer the organisation of discrete factor inputs. It is now the management of rapidly moving emotional and informational flows within flattened organisational structures. If the analysis put forward in this paper is correct, then those involved in the field of IR will have to carefully monitor their theoretical models and discursive constructs if what they say is to resonate in the broader public imagination.

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE LATENT DISCURSIVE CHALLENGE TO IR

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ABSTRACT

Emotional Intelligence has captured both the academic and the popular imagination. In this paper I argue that IR researchers and practitioners need to understand EI as a discursive construct. The thrust of EI is to postulate a postmodern view of both the individual employee and the organisation within which that employee is situated. Even more broadly, EI captures the zeitgeist of fast capitalism in a contemporary global context.

As conceived by Salovey and Mayer (1990), EI straddles the discourse of modernity and postmodernity. It has residues of techno-cognitive values characteristic of modernity, but it postulates an information processing ontology in keeping with the information technology revolution of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the hands of Goleman (1995, 1998), there is a significant shift to a decentred malleability, or plasticity, that is characteristic of a postmodern sensibility.

Goleman's organisational employee is an individual in a continuous process of invention and re-invention. Considered from the perspectives of both HR theory and the workplace agenda of the Howard government, these trends in both the workplace and the broader cultural discourse must be fully understood. The work of Goleman signals a decisive shift in managerial thinking. The task of management is no longer the organisation of discrete factor inputs. It is now the management of rapidly moving emotional and informational flows within flattened organisational structures. If the analysis put forward in this paper is correct, then those involved in the field of IR will have to carefully monitor their theoretical models and discursive constructs if what they say is to resonate in the broader public imagination.

Introduction

From IR to EI: From Modernity to Postmodernity

In this paper I attempt to explain the recent decline of unionism, as well as the sustained attacks on unionism, by looking to the broader cultural field of IR. I take this broader cultural field to encompass the nature of jobs and organisational structures, and also the framework within which both disputes and decision making processes are conceived. I also include within this terrain ideas of management.

I argue that since the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in the early 1970s there have been aspects of globalisation that have been antithetical not just to unions, but to the very foundations of IR itself. The shift from heavy manufacturing industries to those characteristic of the so-called 'knowledge economy' is an important feature of this process, but there are other cultural changes that need to be considered.

As Bauman (2000) notes, all institutions and discursive constructs based on the binary essentialisms of modernity have been called into question. In their place there has emerged a cultural semiotics of speed and flexibility. In the terminology of Bauman (2000), there has been a shift from solid modernity to liquid modernity. I argue that this cultural shift presents a latent discursive challenge to the foundations of IR that goes well beyond the explicit challenge to IR. In the popular imagination, all that is solid may not melt into air, but it must be the subject of a makeover. From nip and tuck and backyard blitz to labour market flexibility, the message is clear: all categories, and all social and institutional arrangements, are in flux. In the IR environment, there is less talk of dividing an essentialist cake, or of maintaining fixed demarcations and stable relativities, than there is of improving energies and flows within flattened organizational structures (Goleman 2002).

Although a detailed discussion of the cultural terrain alluded to here is clearly beyond the scope of this paper, I shall illustrate my argument by focusing on the shift from IR to EI. Concentrating on the trajectory that runs through Gardner to Mayer and Salovey and then to Goleman, I shall argue that there has been, over the last twenty-five years, a profound shift from the essentialist thinking of solid modernity — which focused on fixing, defining and classifying discrete segments of intelligence, such as specific techno-cognitive skills — to liquid modernity, which focuses on flows and relational aspects of human interaction. Liquid modernity is characterised by a decentred concern with flows and images, and with speed and flexibility. In place of the essentialist or foundational thinking of solid modernity there is an orientation towards metaphors of fluidity, circuits and loops, where the primary concepts are malleability, adaptability and plasticity.

The Australian IR System and Solid Modernity

The transformation of the IR framework since the early 1980s parallels the transformation of thinking about intelligence. While the trajectory from Gardner (1983) to Goleman (2002) is from discrete and essentialist techno-cognitive categories of individual intelligence to non-essentialist circuits and emotional flows between both individuals and groups, the focus in the IR environment has shifted from essentialist structures such as awards to 'self-managed' contracts. In the knowledge-based sector, the emphasis has been on HR architecture and emotionally 'intelligent' individuals

The centralised system of wage fixation that prevailed throughout the twentieth century is an obvious expression of the modernist impulse to define, to categorise and then to regulate workplace relations in a rational and efficient manner; but there are other systemic features that are also significant indicia of modernist urges to essentialise and to classify. Specifically, the desire to define and demarcate both industries and jobs according to essentialist descriptions is emblematic of modernity. Once jobs are broken down and defined in detail, such descriptions can then be used as a basis for determining awards. Awards, in turn, can be used as a basis for fixing relativities and for fixing the rights and obligations of both capital and labour.

The development of such a centralised and essentialist system was consistent with a cluster of theories and concepts developed in the early twentieth century. Max Weber's

conception of bureaucracy is a paradigmatic example of this thinking, and so too is Frederick Taylor's desire to isolate and define discrete tasks, to break them down into their component parts, and then to subject them to precise measurement and control.

From the perspective of management, the staffing function of any organisation would be undertaken by a Personnel Department. Such a department would strive to match individual people to specific job descriptions. All job descriptions, of course, required explicit skills and knowledge. Armed with the great selection tools of modernity — such as IQ tests — personnel officers could mix and match measured techno-cognitive skills to formal job descriptions. The architecture of HR was therefore very similar to the architecture of that great toy of modernity, the meccano set. People were placed in the appropriate job, in the appropriate position, in the appropriately constructed organisational hierarchy. The aim was to ensure that there were no square pegs in round holes.

This Fordist framework was based on the assumption that discrete units of capital and labour could be mixed, in Ricardian fashion, by a management that exercised efficient entrepreneurial skill and control. This process was rational, sequentially logical, and based on the idea that with the optimal mixing of discrete factor inputs management could guide the firm —and indeed the economy — towards systemic equilibrium. Put simply, an organisation could remain competitive if it selected the best people for each job and used the most up-to-date machines. The concept of IQ was believed to aid in this selection process

ir in a post-bretton woods era of globalisation

Following the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, regulation was in retreat. Initially this applied to the international financial system — particularly with respect to capital flows and exchange rates — but the logic of this dismantlement placed competitive pressures on domestic economies, which in turn led to internal processes of retreat and dismantlement. Corporate downsizing, microeconomic reform, public sector reform, competition policy and general deregulation were the outcomes of this process. Amidst this rapid process of dismantlement, however, the IR system's rate of change was relatively slow.

Beginning with the various Hawke-Keating Accords and Award Restructuring, the process of change moved quickly to the next phase, which was crystallised as Enterprise Bargaining. After these stages of incremental retreat, the scene was set for a more sustained attack on the foundations of IR. The push for individual contracts under the Howard government is well known. Also well known is the free-market foundation for much of the economic thinking that supports that push. Less well appreciated, however, is the extent to which the emergence of the EI construct implicitly seeks to dismantle the essentialist foundations of IR, and even to dismantle the established architecture of HR management. It is to a consideration of this phenomenon that I shall now turn.

From Gardner to Mayer and Salovey

Gardner and Multiple Intelligence

In the early 1980s Gardner (1983) developed the concept of social intelligence put forward in the 1920s by Thorndike (1920). Gardner challenges traditional conceptions of IQ by suggesting that there are alternative abilities and paths for a diverse population

consisting of people with widely ranging skills and abilities. Although this broad approach to intelligence represents a break from the narrow conceptions of the past, it is much less of a break than is often recognised. Gardner's boundaries were still fairly tightly drawn, and his focus was still predominantly cognitive rather than relational and self-reflexive. His work did have elements of these, but to some extent Gardner also thought that his various intelligences were related to the structure of the brain. In this search for an innate physiological basis to intelligence there is a strong residue of the ontological essentialism of IQ.

Gardner (2002) has recently admitted that while developing his "pluralistic theory" he "still thought that "intelligence was a singular concept" (Gardner, 2002: 140). He apparently believes that his current work has moved on from there, but this belief seems an illusion. He still asserts, for example, that "different tasks call on different intelligences or combinations of intelligences" (Gardner, 2002: 141).

To see intelligence in this way is to see it as a composite, or aggregation, of different compartmentalised entities that can be mixed and matched incrementally, in a Ricardian manner, to produce an instrumentally optimal outcome for each set of tasks presented to the individual. This is still ontologically essentialist. In constructing his analytical framework in this manner Gardner has simply asserted that each individual should choose an optimal specialisation from a portfolio of innate or essentialist skills. Furthermore, it seems that Gardner has a technocratic pedagogical understanding of how the educator should respond to the individual's ontological calculus. The educator, it seems, "is faced with clear-cut educational choices" when faced with the realisation that a child, for example, has "little potential for the development of spatial intelligence". These choices involve "giving up" or "working much harder to deliver instruction" (Gardner, 2002: 141). In expressing the issue in these terms Gardner is effectively advocating a Ricardian approach to resource allocation. The educator's input, it seems, must be allocated in accordance with the child's distribution of innate skills or intelligences. This is portfolio allocation theory guided by the principle of comparative advantage as it applies to multiple intelligences.

Mayer and Salovey

In 1990 Salovey and Mayer formulated a model of Emotional Intelligence. In that work (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) the ontological essentialism found in Gardner was less evident, but it was not expunged. This techno-cognitive form of ontological essentialism has been an intractable philosophical presence underpinning the trajectory of the research field since the initial formulations of IQ. Despite the originality of their conception of EI, Mayer and Salovey have not broken free of this framework. In their work, however, the technical and cognitive aspects that were so characteristic of IQ were now concerned with the appraisal and utilisation of emotion.

It was this conception of emotion that represented a significant advance on earlier conceptions. In a long tradition stretching back to Plato (Despret, 2004: 149-151), Western philosophy had conceived the relationship between emotion and rationality in binary terms. In the twentieth century this approach was expressed in powerful metaphorical and narrative terms by Freud. In Freud's conception, emotions originated in the primal and mythical events that were contained in the biological unconscious. Ontogeny recapitulated phylogeny, so that in the individual the emotions that arose from these events were contained in the dark and murky depths of the id. Freud believed that it was the task of the ego to balance the emotions and desires that arose from the id by

accommodating them to the imperatives of the reality principle (Freud, 1964). In a defensive strategy of containment, the self was repressed and protected, but the outcome was a civilisation riddled with discontents (Freud, 1961).

In some regards Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000) invert Freud; but it is important to note that in other regards they adopt a compartmentalised view of the mind that is firmly rooted in the Freudian tradition of segmentation and containment. They (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2000: 98-99) talk, for example, of the mind and its 'constituent parts'. This mechanistic conception renews some of the techno-cognitive aspects of IQ, with all of the instrumentalist connotations that this implies. Significantly, it also divides the mind into parts, components and compartments, just as Freud sought to do when he used terms such as 'ego' 'id' and 'superego'.

Although they generally depart from a binary conception of emotion and reason, there is a sense in which Mayer and Salovey still adopt a weak binary position. Effectively, they have inverted Freud by domesticating the emotions and transforming them into a knowable and exploitable resource base for the efficient managerial self. In their hands, there is also a sense in which emotions are thought to work in the service of cognition by fast-tracking, or streamlining, the cognitive function. At some points (Mayer et al 1999: 267), they posit a technocratic self that can draw on underlying emotional content, as if it is a resource, in order to achieve efficient outcomes. The individual subject, they say, 'can reason and problem-solve' on the basis of emotions. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000; 107) talk of the 'processing of emotional information' and of 'inputting information from the emotion system'. In this input/output processing model, emotions are fed through a complex system. In their view (2000: 107) emotional intelligence operates 'across both the cognitive and emotional systems'. This systemic ontology of self is not based on a mind/body split, as envisaged by Descartes, but rather on a weak emotional/cognitive systemic split. This binary systemic ontological organization of the human subject is sub-divided into a form of branch management. The human subject has four branches: the first deals with 'emotional perception and identification'; the second and third with processing that information 'with an eye to problem-solving' by 'using emotion to improve cognitive processes' and then to achieve the effective 'cognitive processing of emotion'; and the fourth 'concerns emotional self-management and the management of emotions in other people'.

Mayer and Salovey in a Historico-Cultural Context

It is not difficult to understand why such a conception might seem culturally attractive in the post-Bretton Woods globalised economy. By performing a streamlining function for the intellect in a fast, diverse and complex world driven by information overload, Mayer and Salovey's understanding of EI promises to empower a human subject cut adrift from stable organisational structures and institutions. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000: 109) assert that 'emotions...can impose priorities such that the cognitive system attends to what is important'. Such a resource-based throughput model obviously achieves considerable improvements in emotional data processing and management. Not surprisingly, Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000: 108) see emotional intelligence as contributing to intellectual growth. They seem to see this as a contemporary form of self-improvement, but without the onto-theological aspects that characterised nineteenth-century conceptions of self improvement. In contrast to those conceptions, which had as their focus a cleansing of the soul, Mayer, Salovey and Caruso have as their focus a cleansing of the emotional/intellectual branch processing system. With the

clearance of blockages; they have effectively advocated a modern form of ontological waste management.

Despite the emphasis they place on systems management and streamlined information processing, Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000: 111) remain wedded to ontological essentialism. They are critical of Goleman's (1995) "popular claim" that emotional intelligence "unlike other intelligences...can be learned". Although they do not revert to claims made for IQ that techno-cognitive skills reside deep within the structure of the individual self, and are therefore immutable, Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2000: 111) suggest that many of the "personality traits that are listed as a part of emotional intelligence...have rather considerable genetic, biological, and early-learning contributions, which, as with other parts of personality, make them difficult, albeit not impossible, to change". Given that emotional intelligence, as they themselves conceive it, could be seen as largely attitudinal rather than technical or biological in nature, it is difficult to see the logic upon which they assert a genetic basis to their own model of EI.

From Mayer and Salovey to Goleman: From Information Processing to the Flexible Human Subject

Although Goleman developed the work of Mayer and Salovey, he is no mere populariser of their work. His 'Emotional Competence Framework' is almost entirely self-reflexive and socially relational (Goleman, 1995, 26-27). This stands in contrast to the greater emphasis on cognitive skills evident in the work of Mayer et al. Goleman also emphasises motivation, which is virtually absent from the concerns of Mayer et al. Furthermore, his emphasis on empathy, social skills, self-awareness and self-regulation reflects a desire to keep the emotional process in a constant state of motion. Indeed, Goleman seems more concerned with emotional flows and circuits rather than with the creation and development of emotional and intellectual stocks. In this sense, he might be thought of as a post-Ricardian economist of the emotions, whereas Mayer and Salovey appear distinctly Ricardian.

Goleman departs from Mayer and Salovey in another important regard. Their focus is always on the individual subject, even when that subject is situated in a social context. The individual subject identifies, processes and regulates its own emotional states and also tries to efficiently manage and manipulate the emotional states of others, but the focal point of analysis is always the individual. In his more recent work Goleman's focus is not just on the individual, but on 'consensual emotions' and "emotions (as) an open loop system" (Goleman, 2002: 25). He says that on "a resonant team" the members "vibrate together" (Goleman, 2002: 26-27). Resonance, he says, "releases energy in people, and it increases the amount of energy available to the team" (Goleman, 2002: 26).

Goleman's conception of EI implies not only a new conception of the human subject but also a new conception of intellectual capital and human resource management in the contemporary global economy.

Goleman's work is attractive to knowledge-based workers who are now more likely than hitherto to change employment at regular intervals (Sennett, 1998). Goleman's emotionally intelligent individual is constantly adapting the self, as a niche product, to the needs of a rapidly moving world. For Goleman (1998:239-243) the human subject can be in a constant process of making and unmaking itself, of learning and unlearning habits and patterns of thoughts. There is no sense here in which it can be thought that Goleman has in mind a single measurement of EI; and nor can it be thought that his

concept of EI is either fixed or bounded. His conception of EI is not generic in the way that IQ once was, and nor is it rooted in cognition and information processing to the extent that it is in Mayer and Salovey's conception of EI. His competencies can be adapted, modified and mixed creatively to form a shifting portfolio of attributes that can be pitched in different ways to different organisational types (Goleman, 1998: 259-262). Goleman's human subject can be seen as a flexible emotional inventory to be delivered 'just in time' to a highly nuanced and rapidly changing spread of different organisational types.

Conclusions

Clearly, this view of the human subject is well suited to the needs of flexible and fast moving organisations. It is also well suited to flattened organisational structures characterised by complex networks of teams and internal organisational flows. Information in the post-Bretton Woods economy is concerned as much with unimpeded flows than it is with incremental additions to fixed stocks of knowledge or intellectual capital. Goleman's emotionally intelligent individual is constantly adapting the self, as a niche product, to the needs of a rapidly moving world. According to Goleman (1998), different organisations place different premiums on different types of emotional skills. Both internally and externally, Goleman's emotionally intelligent human subject is remaking itself according to the shifting currents of the marketplace.

Goleman's organisations are vibrating energy flows without a central locus (Goleman 1998). In this postmodern world of shimmering surfaces and decentred flows any idea of entrenched binary positions — whether they be conflicts, contradictions or simply oppositional positions — doesn't make sense. The idea of substantive conflict doesn't have any real role in Goleman's conception, because all conflicts are at least partly emotional and therefore amenable to emotional management. Once this position is accepted, then any institutionalised means of resolving conflict may in fact be seen as a barrier to its resolution, principally because institutionalising — or formalising — approaches to conflict management will inevitably divert energies and attention from the emotional aspects that Goleman believes reside at the core of the conflict. Formal institutional policies for workplace management also imply a sense of both stasis and essentialism, and such ideas are antithetical to Goleman's conception of EI. Even more significantly, the responsibility of any emotionally intelligent individual conceived by Goleman is to avoid such fixed positions. Goleman's emotionally intelligent individual will be sufficiently flexible and adaptive to manage emotional flows. Accordingly, the need for collective IR structures does not even arise.

The challenge for IR practitioners is clear. Goleman has popularised EI in mainstream culture. Movement and flexibility are part of the *zeitgeist* of our times, but their relevance order to focus on structural sources of exploitation and conflict practitioners will have to talk of clearing barriers that prevent the attainment of productive organizational flows. Conflicts should be seen as markers, or *indicia*, of barriers that require attention. Discursively, all vestiges of essentialist modernity should be expunged from dealings with management, except perhaps in industries that still display some resemblance to the Fordist era. The problem here, however, is that as traditional manufacturing industries continue to recede in overall significance within the post-Bretton Woods economy there is a danger that such approaches to IR will be increasingly marginalised.

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