

**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS
AND INFORMATION FLOWS: GOLEMAN AND
GLOBALIZATION**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) as articulated by Goleman. In doing so, it sees his theory as a development of, and a point of departure from, the concept articulated by Mayer and Salovey. In a wider sense, while Mayer and Salovey focus on the role of emotional intelligence in expediting information processing and rational decision making, Goleman focuses on emotional and informational circuits and flows. Furthermore, Goleman sees the emotionally intelligent human subject as extremely malleable. Goleman's EI is then put forward as a key category to facilitate a research agenda in the areas of structural holes and social networks.

Key words: emotional intelligence, information processing, structural holes, social networks.

Introduction

Although the focus of this paper is the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) as expressed in the work of Goleman (1995, 1998), it is important to recognize the prior groundwork laid by Mayer and Salovey (1990, 1993). In some regards it might be thought that Goleman merely popularized the work of Mayer and Salovey. This, I believe, is misleading. While their influence on his work is evident, there are some significant distinctions between his work and theirs. Mayer and Salovey, for example, place a great deal of emphasis on the relationship between emotions, cognition and information processing, whereas Goleman is more concerned with emotional flows and the role played in these flows by a malleable and adaptable human subject. It is the relationship between emotional flows and information, particularly within a contemporary organizational context, that are my principal areas of concern. In order to understand the significance of EI in relation to information and emotion, it is essential to examine Goleman as a development of, and a point of departure from, the work of Mayer and Salovey.

During the course of this discussion it will be evident that I regard the concept of EI as one that is embedded in the culture of our times. I wish to pursue this aspect of EI by showing how it can be related to other issues in management theory that have emerged at more or less the same moment in history as EI.

Specifically, I shall relate the concept of EI to the concepts of structural holes (Burt 1992, 1997) and to the concept of network cohesion (see Coleman, 1988, 1990). An exploration of EI in this context seems a productive avenue for research, since it is clear that both structural holes and network cohesion are concerned with informational and emotional flows within an organization in a context that is lateral rather than vertical in orientation. In other words, it seems reasonable to theorise that in contexts that are not subject to the formal exercise of managerial power from above, EI is likely to be seen as especially significant to human interaction. In other words, I suggest that EI, structural holes and social network cohesion are all indicia of fast moving and flexible organizations in a borderless global economy, particularly in the knowledge-driven sectors.

Mayer and Salovey: Emotions, Cognition and Information Processing

Mayer and Salovey focus on 26 relatively unchanging character traits. Their understanding of EI is significantly relational and self-reflexive, but it also contains a strong cognitive component that bears some resemblance to technical, task-based conceptions of IQ (Mayer and Salovey, 1997: 5).

One of the most significant aspects of the work of Mayer and Salovey is their reconsideration of the relationship between the

emotions and reason. The binary opposition of these two categories has bedeviled Western thought since Plato (Despret, 2004: 149-151). In the twentieth century, this binary thinking was adapted and incorporated into the Freudian paradigm. For Freud, emotions originated in a primal realm, far removed from the realm occupied by the rational ego. In a defensive strategy of containment and accommodation, the Freudian ego moderated between the demands of the pleasure principle and the imperatives of restraint and accommodation as dictated by the reality principle. The outcome was an adaptive but repressed self, and a civilisation riddled with discontents (Freud, 1961).

Mayer and Salovey have cut through this binary conception of emotion and rationality. In contrast to Freud, who saw the emotions as a repressed threat lurking below and behind a veneer of rationality, Mayer and Salovey see the emotions as an exploitable resource base. In their conception, the emotionally intelligent subject can use the emotions as a partner in efficient decision making. Instead of being antithetical to reason, the emotions are seen as a support mechanism for the rational cognitive processes of the liberal autonomous self. The individual subject, they say, 'can reason and problem-solve on the basis of' emotions' (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 1999: 267). It is important to appreciate that at all times in the work of Mayer and Salovey there is a concern with the informational and

decision-making requirements of a rational and autonomous human subject.

Mayer and Salovey's conception of the relationship between emotion and cognition is similar in some regards to the model put forward by Pascual-Leone (1991). In the Pascual-Leone process-analytical model of emotions, emotional affect operates as a signal system to inform, direct and regulate cognition. It should be noted that this model of emotion-assisted information processing, and its attendant efficiencies, is also evident in the work of Damasio (1994) and Mischel and Shoda (1995).

It is difficult to believe that these constructs of Mayer and Salovey — and perhaps Pascual-Leone, Damasio and Mischel and Shoda — are not influenced in some way by the ideas of information processing and economic efficiency that are so prominent in contemporary culture. Conceived in this way, the emotions are in fact more efficient than rational cognitive processes. They filter out the irrelevant mass of stimuli that bombard and overload the rational individual in the contemporary world of informational excess, and they intuitively streamline and expedite the cognitive processes. By way of analogy, they may be thought of as a fast and highly efficient search engine at the behest of a competent user who can manage and manipulate data at the emotion-cognition interface.

In Mayer and Salovey, then, there is a latent desire to transform emotions into knowledge, and thereby to fix them. So conceived, emotions are part of a developing stock of intellectual capital. In this sense, EI as conceived by Mayer and Salovey is clearly relevant to a knowledge economy characterised by informational excess, but their concept of EI is still rooted in a traditional conception of intellectual capital accumulation.

Goleman: Emotions and Human Plasticity

Although Goleman developed the work of Mayer and Salovey, he should in no way be seen as a 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 and Salovey. Goleman also emphasises motivation, which is virtually absent from the concerns of Mayer and Salovey. 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

By contrast with the approach of Mayer and Salovey, Goleman's orientation is towards a fluid engagement with intermingled

flows. 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. In this regard, Goleman's theory of EI is remarkably fluid. This becomes clear when it is appreciated how Goleman considers the relationship that his twenty five emotional competencies have to different occupations and work situations. 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 woven, and mixed and interrelated in creative ways, to develop a flexible and malleable emotional product that can be pitched, as the product equivalent of a one-off, at a target niche in the workplace market (Goleman, 1998: 259-262). Goleman's human subject can be seen as an emotional inventory to be delivered 'just in time' to a highly nuanced and rapidly changing spread of different organizational types.

Goleman is clearly concerned with flows rather than stocks, and in pursuit of this concept he draws heavily on the language and imagery of computer networks. The brain, he says, 'is designed so that distressing emotions disable rational thought' (Goleman, 2002: 25). Conceived in this way, the emotions are analogous to

a software program. Effectively, they operate as a system scanning device, programmed to detect and come into operation when predetermined limits are breached. Such a system override alerts the user to an area of activity that requires attention and directs them to the cerebral help desk. Pursuing the cyber metaphor, Goleman claims that emotions 'are an open loop system' (Goleman, 2002: 25). Within this open loop system, however, emotions 'are contagious' (Goleman, 2002: 25).

This is where the role of the leader comes into play. According to Goleman, the leader's 'fundamental task is an emotional task' (Goleman, 2002: 25). In a team context, 'resonance releases energy in people, and it increases the amount of energy available to the team' (Goleman, 2002: 26). It might be thought that Goleman seeks to arrest emotional flows and convert them into collective intellectual stocks in a manner similar to the approach adopted by Mayer and Salovey, but this would be wrong: his fluidly conceived EI remains more open than that. According to Goleman, it is the leader's job to identify these emotions and to show 'how the team relates beyond to the larger web in the organization' (Goleman, 2002: 26). On a resonant team, according to Goleman, 'the members vibrate together, so to speak, with positive emotional energy'. (Goleman, 2002: 26-27).

Clearly, Goleman sees EI as part of an organization's energy flows. In his conception of EI, the leader fosters in the group a

‘political awareness as a group’ so that it can ‘access resources in a larger organization’ (Goleman, 2002: 26). In constructing EI in this fluid manner, Goleman sees it as an essential aspect of the circuits, loops and energy flows of the modern organization.

Goleman’s concerns, however, extend well beyond the boundaries of any organizational entity. His malleable human subject can make and remake itself in harmony with the highly nuanced demands of a flexible marketplace so that, at any moment, it can tap into these rapidly moving flows. 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. In a corporate world of creative, knowledge-oriented teams, freed from rigid vertical hierarchies of power, effective and sensitive communication with others attracts a premium in the marketplace. 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. For Goleman, ‘dispersed leadership’ contributes to the accumulation of ‘emotional capital’ (Goleman, 2002: 30).

It must also be said that 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. Both internally and externally, Goleman's emotionally intelligent human subject is remaking itself according to the shifting currents of the marketplace.

Goleman's Flows in Relation to Structural Holes and Network Cohesion

While Mayer and Salovey explore the relationship between emotions and information processing, Goleman builds upon their work by relating EI to rapid flows of energy, information and emotion within organizations and between individuals. If this assertion is correct, then his conception of EI seems very relevant to recent research on structural holes and social network cohesion.

As Burt (1992, 1997) argues, structural holes exist when people or groups are isolated from each other, thereby impeding an optimal flow of information between them. Any individual who facilitates communication between these two groups will be able to establish a competitive advantage over others in an organization because he or she will have access to valuable information not otherwise available to others (Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000: 184). Clearly, an individual who redirects organizational flows and energies in this manner will be someone who is flexible, emotionally intelligent and an effective

communicator. In other words, such a person would be the effective, flexible, and emotionally intelligent human subject imagined by Goleman.

To this date, there is no evidence in the literature of any perceived link between EI and structural holes. Furthermore, there is much that is unknown about what kind of individuals are able to facilitate links between structural holes, and even by what manner and processes such links are in fact established. On the other hand, the concepts of EI and structural holes have emerged at almost identical moments in time, and there is every reason to believe that EI would be a quality conducive to the establishment of links and connections between different groups. Much research on the potential role of EI in overcoming structural holes therefore needs to be undertaken.

The establishment of links between separate and unconnected groups is not the only area of potential research to which Goleman's concept of EI might be adapted. Social networks are also significant. Unlike structural holes, social networks are cohesive and reasonably self-contained groups. Information, however, is distributed unevenly within any network, regardless of the degree of cohesion that characterizes that network. In all cohesive networks, however, elements of trust and cooperation are important (Podolny & Baron, 1997). In the context of any cohesive social network, the role of Goleman's emotionally

sensitive individual in securing trust and cooperation in the service of informational flows is a phenomenon to which his concept of EI seems well suited. This is because individuals who achieve prominent roles in a cohesive network would seem to be those individuals who possess the skills necessary to monitor their own emotional states as well as the emotional states of others.

There is much to be discovered about the way in which EI relates to management theories that are concerned directly with information and communicative flows within contemporary organizations. If the preceding analysis of Goleman is correct, then his conception of EI should be used as part of a research agenda in the investigation of structural holes and social networks.

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