

Meetup Lesson 8 Outline
Life intelligence: Understanding who you are and what life is all about
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Objectives:

1. To learn the concept of life intelligence (LQ).
2. To understand why LQ is necessary for meaningful living.
3. To understand the important role of LQ in minimizing mistakes and problems and at the same time, maximizing the likelihood of flourishing.

Introduction:

The serenity prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” – Reinhold Niebuhr

We have already learned the blueprint and the practical guide for meaningful living, but what kind of intelligence do we need in order to implement the plan for meaningful living on a daily basis? We propose that it takes life intelligence to live well and die well.

You need high IQ to excel in school and professions that depend on cognitive abilities such as abstract reasoning, verbal comprehension, and problem solving. You need superior EQ to do well in business and professions that emphasize interpersonal interaction (Goleman, 1995). However, IQ and EQ are not enough.

Remember Bill Clinton? He is clearly a person with high IQ and EQ. Yet he made major blunders which almost derailed his presidency and dragged the entire nation through so much pain. His attempt to cover up his affair was downright foolish, because it not only made the original problem much worse, but also brought great harm to himself and many others. This is more than a moral failing; it reflects a lack of sound judgment.

We may attribute Clinton’s high-risk and self-destructive behaviour to human frailty, which is common to all human beings. But such rationalization does not prevent us from messing up our lives. If we attribute his debacle to a failure in life intelligence, then there is hope for us to learn how to make the right decisions that not only resolve the problem, but also bring benefit to the self and others.

Life intelligence (LQ) calls for IQ, EQ and other types of intelligences in order to respond to life’s many challenges and predicaments wisely and courageously. Simply put, LQ is the ability to integrate multiple intelligences and virtues to survive and flourish under conditions of complexity, uncertainty and high stress.

Definition of IQ

Psychologists used to believe that general intelligence is the general ability to adapt well and solve problems in all domains of human activities.

David Wechsler is most well-known for developing intelligence scales, such as the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). He (1944) defines intelligence as “the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, think rationally, and deal with his environment effectively” (1944, p. 3).

General intelligence actually consists of a number of specific abilities such as:

- Verbal comprehension
- Abstract thinking or reasoning
- Processing speed
- Problem solving
- Ability to acquire and retain knowledge
- Adaptability to the environment
- Capacity for creative and productive thoughts

Definition of EQ

Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as, “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) proposed a model that identified four different factors of emotional intelligence: the perception of emotion, the ability to reason using emotions, the ability to understand emotion, and the ability to manage emotions.

1. **Perceiving Emotions:** The first step in understanding emotions is to accurately perceive them. In many cases, this might involve understanding nonverbal signals such as body language and facial expressions.
2. **Reasoning with Emotions:** The next step involves using emotions to promote thinking and cognitive activity. Emotions help prioritize what we pay attention to and react to; we respond emotionally to things that garner our attention.
3. **Understanding Emotions:** The emotions that we perceive can carry a wide variety of meanings. If someone is expressing angry emotions, the observer must interpret the cause of their anger and what it might mean. For example, if your boss is acting angry, it might mean that he is dissatisfied with your work, or it could be because he got a speeding ticket on his way to work that morning, or that he's been fighting with his wife.
4. **Managing Emotions:** The ability to manage emotions effectively is a key part of emotional intelligence. Regulating emotions, responding appropriately, and responding to the emotions of others are all important aspect of emotional management.

Definition of Life Intelligence (LQ)

- It is the ability to integrate multiple intelligences, especially existential and spiritual intelligences, to make wise decisions in complex and uncertain situations.
- It is this ability to acquire wisdom and courage to live an authentic, meaningful and virtuous life in an imperfect world.

Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

More recently, educational psychologists have further expanded the various types of intelligences and abilities. Howard Gardner's work has received the most attention.

Howard Gardner's Eight Types of Intelligences

1. Visual-spatial Intelligence
2. Verbal-linguistic Intelligence
3. Bodily-kinesthetic Intelligence
4. Logical-mathematical Intelligence
5. Interpersonal Intelligence
6. Musical Intelligence
7. Intrapersonal Intelligence
8. Naturalistic Intelligence

Gardner's (1999) explores three additional intelligences:

- Spiritual intelligence
- Existential intelligence
- Moral intelligence

I propose that these 3 intelligences represent 3 types of psychological resources.

Multiple Intelligences and Understanding the World

I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place...An important part of that understanding is knowing who we are and what we can do...Ultimately, we must synthesize our understandings for ourselves. The performance of understanding that try matters are the ones we carry out as human beings in an imperfect world which we can affect for good or for ill. (Gardner, 2006, p. 166)

Definition of Spiritual Intelligence

Spiritual intelligence refers to a set of capacities related to transcendental matters such as spirituality and religiosity.

Those with high spiritual intelligence are spiritually attuned and enlightened. Their core values and major decisions are guided primarily by spiritual intelligence.

Robert Emmons (2000) defines spiritual intelligence as “the adaptive use of spiritual information to facilitate everyday problem solving and goal attainment” (p. 59).

Zohar and Marshall (2001) define spiritual intelligence as “the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context” (p. 4).

Spiritual intelligence has gained increasing recognition as an important resource in the corporate world. Stephen H. Covey (2004): “Spiritual intelligence is the central and most fundamental of all the intelligences, because it becomes the source of guidance for the other[s]...” (p. 53).

Definition of Existential Intelligence

Existential intelligence refers to the ability to tackle the big questions of human existence, such as the meaning of life and death in an imperfect world.

It is primarily based on self-reflection and existential/spiritual quest to gain insight and understanding about one’s ultimate concerns, one’s place in the world, and the human condition.

Carl Rogers (1995) once said that what is personal is universal and what is universal is also personal. If we focus on the big questions of life, the small problems can be easily resolved. Conversely, if we focus on the small problems, but ignore the big questions in life, then we are likely to get stuck or lost in trivial problems.

Definition of Moral Intelligence

Moral intelligence refers to ethical concerns and the ability to conduct ourselves in a way that respects the sanctity of life and the rights of others.

It is also related to the quest for moral understanding that differentiates right from wrong as well as noble from selfish goals.

It is predicated on the belief that we live in a moral universe and are moral agents.

The Components of Life Intelligence (LQ)

The main defining characteristics of LQ are wisdom, courage and a philosophy of life based on meaning and virtues.

4 Main Components of LQ:

1. Courage
2. Self-knowledge
3. Understanding life, others, and the human condition
4. Problem-solving

These four components were measured by the Life Intelligence Test (LQT; Wong, 2011) posted on www.inpm.org.

Courage

- The courage to be oneself (authentic) and to do what is right.
- The moral fortitude to say “No” to powerful others in order to maintain one’s integrity.
- The courage to confess one’s mistakes and make amends.
- The courage to accept, confront, transform, or overcome negativities.
- The courage to pursue major life goals in spite of setbacks and threats.

Self-knowledge

- The wisdom to be fully aware of one’s strengths and weaknesses.
- A clear sense of philosophical and psychological understanding about one’s self-identity and one’s place in the world.
- A clear and consistent sense of self, regardless of the circumstances.
- Willingness to revise one’s self-concept to accommodate new realities and insights.
- A clear sense of purpose and calling regarding what to do with one’s life.
- A clear understanding of one’s own psychological make-up, emotional states, and attitudes.
- Knowledge of self as someone special and distinct from other people.

Self-deception

- We tend to know ourselves less than we think we do.
- Self-deception is the maintenance of one’s belief in the face of strong contrary evidence.
- Self-deception undermines human agency (Baron, 1988) and threatens our moral integrity (Jenni, 2003).
- Self-knowledge includes the ability to recognize self-deception.

Types of Self-deception

- Positive intentional
- Negative intentional
- Self-defense
- Cognitive illusion

Understanding Life, Others, and the Human Condition

- A clear understanding of what really matters and what makes life worth living.
- Developing a sense of coherence (Korotkov, 1998) in the midst of chaos, paradoxes, predicaments, complexities and absurdities of life.
- Having a set of beliefs and worldviews that facilitate decision-making and life planning.
- Treating others with empathy, kindness, humility, and respect.
- Understanding people and knowing how to relate to different individuals.

- Being a sound judge of characters, knowing the differences between friends and foes.
- A good understanding of the human condition, human nature, and existential givens.

Problem-solving

- Knowing how to manage available resources, overcome obstacles, and get the job done.
- Knowing how to put aside ego and biases to resolve conflicts rationally.
- The ability to understand an issue from different perspectives and the larger scheme of things.
- Knowing how to balance competing interests and demands.
- Having the wisdom to make good decisions in situations of complexity and ambiguity.
- Having the wisdom of knowing when to persist and when to quit.
- Being flexible, creative, and resourceful in problem-solving.

The Importance of Life Intelligence (LQ)

The importance of life intelligence becomes apparent, when we consider how many highly accomplished individuals, have ended up making a mess of their lives: some have committed suicide, others have ended up in jail, and still others become homeless junkies. All their degrees, credentials, honors, and successes have not prevented them from making risky and foolish decisions that ended up ruining their lives as well as the lives of those close to them.

Life is too short and too fragile to allow too many costly mistakes. Life is too complex and unpredictable to succeed without wisdom and courage. Life is full of paradoxes and mysteries such that we cannot achieve a sense of coherence without existential and spiritual intelligences. In other words, one of the greatest tragedies in life is having a high IQ and high EQ with a failing grade in LQ.

Basically, LQ has to do with the important life lessons we all need in order to survive and flourish in a world that is full of complexities, contradictions, paradoxes, and dangers.

The good thing about LQ is that many of these important lessons were learned when we were still in kindergarten (Fulghum, 2004). Lessons such as play fair, take turns, and don't hit people are relevant to people of all ages. We also learn important life lessons at Sunday School, such as the Golden Rule, love your neighbours, and faith in God.

These basic life lessons can be translated into important life principles that guide us throughout our lives. Life principles such as justice, do no harm, altruism, empathy, and faith provide important guides for living meaningfully, virtuously, and wisely.

In sum, LQ is important because it brings out the best in human beings and curbs the dark side of the human condition. It takes LQ to navigate through the storms, shoals, and siren

sounds. It takes LQ to arrive at the destination safe and sound. It also takes LQ to live a life rich in happiness and significance.

High and Low LQ Compared

The best way to compare people with high and low LQ is to observe and measure how these two groups react to highly stressful situations such as natural disasters and life threatening illness. The prediction is that people with high LQ are much more likely to come through all the above situations relatively unscathed and become even stronger.

We can also observe how the two groups would react differently when they are thrust into various temptations such as windfall profits, positions of power, or sexual seductions.

LQ and the Meaningful Living

LQ is essential for meaningful living for the following reasons:

1. The four components of LQ are all essential for meaningful living.
2. Existential intelligence and spiritual intelligence are also a big part of LQ.
3. LQ is involved in applying the knowledge of meaningful living to daily living.
4. LQ draws upon a wide variety of life experiences and sources of wisdom in order to make life more meaningful.
5. LQ focuses on the wisdom and courage needed to implement the plan for meaningful living.
6. LQ emphasizes the practice of reflection and the Aha! moments of awakening.

Triggers for the Quest for LQ

Many things can trigger one's quest for LQ. Po Bronson's (2002) *What Should I Do With My Life* shows that the trigger varies from individual to individual. It can be a sudden epiphany or a time of life transition.

In Woody Allen's film *Hannah and Her Sisters* produced by Robert Greenhut (1986), Mickey (played by Woody Allen) was worried that he might have cancer. When the medical test came out negative, he suddenly realized that he needed to quit his job and embark on a spiritual quest. This is how he explained his decision to an associate: "Do you realize what a thread we're all hanging by? Can you understand how meaningless everything is? Everything. I gotta get some answers."

The fragility and brevity of life demands that we pay attention to LQ. We cannot live well and die graciously without it.

If any of the following items is relevant to your life, then you may want to consider embarking on a quest for meaning and LQ.

- I have messed up my life.
- My life is spinning out of control.

- I need a new direction.
- I need to find a reason for living.
- I want to have something or someone to believe in.
- I need to restore my faith and hope.
- I don't know what to do about my anger and frustration.
- I am really hurting inside.
- I don't know how to be free from my inner pain and bondage.
- I feel helpless and hopeless.
- I feel that my life is boring and empty.
- I feel that life is passing me by.
- I feel trapped and stuck.
- I feel like an exile, not belonging anywhere.
- I feel like no one really cares whether I live or die.
- I can't go on like this anymore.
- I am tired of the endless struggles.
- I don't know who I am or why I am here.
- I don't know what I really want in life.
- I don't know what I believe.
- I don't know where I am headed.
- I am afraid of what will become of me.
- Life does not seem to make sense.
- Life sucks.
- I don't have a future.
- I can't stand most people.
- I resent the fact that many wicked people prosper.
- I am troubled that there is no justice in this world.
- Since we all have to die, it makes no difference how I live.
- If this life is all there is, I don't see the point in living.
- I want to find something worth living for.
- I am searching for authentic happiness.
- I am looking for true love.
- I want to know where there is an ultimate purpose.
- I want to know God.
- I want to be a better person.
- I want to make my life count.
- I want to make a difference in this world.
- I want to make some changes in my life.
- I need to rearrange my priorities.
- I want to fulfill all my potentials and dreams.
- I want to make this world a better place.
- I want to leave a good legacy.

The Importance of Wisdom

Wisdom and LQ

- Wisdom makes up for 3 of the 4 components of LQ.
- Wisdom has been regarded as one of the cardinal virtues by philosophers from the East and West.
- Wisdom is needed to resolve major life problems for the common good (Clayton, 1982; Sternberg, 1985).
- Wisdom involves the application of knowledge to achieve a deep understanding of self, others, and the world in order to arrive at a meaningful solution to difficult problems.

The Value of Wisdom (Prov. 3: 13-26)

- More valuable than gold and silver.
- Living a long, healthy and happy life.
- Using common sense and sound judgment.
- Avoiding danger and evil.
- Protecting us against harm and worry.

Remember King Solomon of the Bible? When God appeared to Solomon and said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you”. Of all things, he asked for wisdom so that he could be a good king to the people of Israel. God was pleased with his request and promised him: “I will give you a wise and discerning heart” (1 King 3:3-28).

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. – Proverbs 9:10

Why is fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom?

- Focusing on God helps clear your mind and remove your confusion.
- Seeking God’s will provides direction and guidance.
- It gives us courage to stand up against evil.
- It keeps our ego and selfish desires in check.
- It motivates us to pursue what is good and holy.

Aristotle’s *Phronesis* (Practical Wisdom; 2004)

- This concept is sometimes translated as prudence or practical wisdom.
- It is the ability to determine the appropriate end and decide on the appropriate means to achieve the desired end.
- Aristotle considered eudaimonia to be the desired end.
- *Phronesis* is concerned with how to act in a specific situation.
- It is both a necessary and sufficient condition for living a virtuous life (eudaimonia).
- Maturation is necessary for gaining practical wisdom.

The importance of practical wisdom in modern living has been emphasized by Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe (2010). Based on Aristotle, Schwartz stresses the need of doing the right thing in the right way at the right time, and treating other people well.

Sternberg's (1998) Balance Theory of Wisdom

- Having the practical intelligence of forming sound judgment when there are competing interests without a clear resolution.
- Knowing how to balance self interest with other people's interest in different contexts to achieve a common good.

Wisdom is needed to solve major life problems for the common good in ambiguous and uncertain situations (Sternberg, 1985).

Baltes and Staudinger (2000) define wisdom as “ways and means of planning, managing and understanding a good life...wisdom is an expertise in conduct and meaning of life” (p. 124).

How do we develop life intelligence?

Given the importance of LQ for meaningful living and enhancing humanity, we need to develop a clear vision and a realistic strategy to develop a high LQ society.

LQ Can Be Learned

The good news is that LQ can be learned and cultivated by anyone, regardless of age and educational level. One can learn LQ through taking a course such as the Meaningful Living Project, studying the wisdom literature, and following a faith.

Most schools teach us knowledge and skills, but not how to live well as a decent human being. We often learn LQ the hard way—through trial and error, but more importantly we can learn LQ from the accumulated wisdom of all the sages, scholars and saints who have gone before us. The Bible and other sacred scriptures are also important sources of LQ.

How to Cultivate Life Intelligence

- Reflect on one's life experiences, especially from painful experiences.
- Discover the secrets to success from failures.
- Learn PP 2.0 (Wong, 2011) – guarding against the pitfalls of positivity and developing the positive potentials of negativity.
- Learn from other people, especially wise people.
- Learn from the wisdom literature.
- Cultivate an attitude of being open-minded, curious and inquisitive.
- Develop the courage to explore and engage life.
- The best way to teach LQ is through inspiration, modelling and reflection.

Conclusion

I cannot think of any intelligence more important than LQ in the 21st Century. Most major problems confronting us today, such as terrorism, poverty, war, and environmental pollution, are related to human behaviours. Similarly, many emotional disorders such as depression and anxiety are related to adjustment difficulties. In all these cases, I

hypothesize that high LQ promises to be an effective and economic way to overcome these human problems. Research funding is desperately needed to test out many of the ideas presented in this lecture.

I also propose that LQ holds the key to human flourishing. One can score high on PERMA (Seligman, 2011) but still end up miserable with a failed marriage, alienated children, and a ruined reputation because of a string of poor judgment and moral transgressions. It will not be difficult to document individuals who start well but end badly.

A High LQ Society

LQ is important regardless of whether you work in the business world or in government services. Considering the pressures and complex problems you face, only a high level of LQ can spare you from unnecessary blunders and at the same time increase the likelihood of making good decisions that benefit yourself and others.

My vision for the future is to develop a high LQ society, where people are trained and reinforced to exercise LQ every day in order to live meaningfully and create a humane society. We can start teaching LQ from kindergarten all the way to university.

To the extent LQ is integrative, it calls for a holistic education that recognizes that we are bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings. LQ is the special kind of intelligence that makes appropriate use of all types of intelligences in order to implement the principles and practices of meaningful living.

A meaning-centered positive psychology is predicated on the proposition that the good life can only be achieved when we are smart enough to recognize that all living things and all nations are interconnected to the extent that an excessive focus on individual happiness and success will widen the gap between the haves and have-nots, and create instability and conflict on a wide scale.

Exercise

- When you review your life, what major mistakes have you made and what lessons have you learned?
- If you were to start all over again, how would you live differently?

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