

Mind Your Business . . .
Energizing Multiple Intelligences to Maximize Performance
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No matter what your business it is often your main business to hire good workers and figure out how to get a job done in the best and most efficient way. To achieve these goals you must deal with issues of management. You may often find yourself called upon to: 1) select the right people for the job; and 2) maximize motivation over the long term; and 3) help people to work together. You might even have to actually do the job yourself, if push comes to shove.

In short, it is your job to see that your organization operates effectively day in and day out. I'm sure that you hope that you are leading your organization intelligently. What does that mean? What is intelligence anyway? Is it related to common sense? Is it the same thing as wisdom? Does it involve creative thinking? Or is intelligence merely the ability to score highly on math and IQ-type tests?

Intelligence is an abstract term like obscenity or beauty- its meaning resides in the eye of the beholder- in other words, you know it when you see it. Likewise psychologists have debated the composition of intelligence for a hundred years or more while philosophers have pondered its meaning for millennia. In 1983 Howard Gardner wrote the book, *Frames of Mind*, in which he redefined the concept of intelligence by introducing the notion of *multiple intelligences*. His basic idea is that there is more to being smart than what shows up on an IQ test.

This really isn't as revolutionary an idea as it may seem at first. I'm sure that you have known more than a one book smart person who was rather incompetent in daily life and conversely, persons with limited education who displayed remarkable abilities. Some of the most effective and wisest people I've known have had lackluster (or non-existent) high school careers. How do we cope with this disparity when we must select people who will perform well in our places of employment?

Howard Gardner helps us deal with this dilemma by defining intelligence as *the ability to solve problems, create products and solve problems that are valued in a community*. Based on this definition he goes on to describe eight distinct yet related forms of intelligence that are possessed by all people, but in varying degrees. These eight intelligences are linguistic, logical-mathematical (the two associated with IQ), spatial, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. A proposed ninth intelligence, existential, is currently being investigated.

Howard Gardner wrote *Frames of Mind* primarily for psychologists to provide a scholarly argument for expanding the unitary IQ concept that has dominated popular as well as psychological thinking for nearly a century. One influential psychologist has defined intelligence as being "that which intelligence tests measure." Duh. I don't believe this is really very helpful. Suffice it to say, psychologists (who all score highly on *their*

IQ tests) have been mostly cool to hostile in their responses to the idea that there are multiple forms of intelligence as opposed to their sacred unitary, general intelligence.

Interestingly, it has been teachers who have responded with sustained enthusiasm to the MI idea. It seems to match their classroom experience with students who exhibit a wide range and diversity of intelligent behaviors and learning propensities. Where IQ seems to define the limits of a student's abilities, the idea of MI helps teachers to recognize a student's learning *potential*. For almost 20 years since MI was first introduced educators around the world have been working to transform schools and classrooms with MI-inspired instruction and curriculum that will maximize student achievement and potential. These changes are taking place at all educational levels from university professors to early childhood educators.

How can the idea of multiple intelligences (MI) be applied to *your* daily work as a team leader, coordinator, manager, director or corporate executive? What do learning and teaching have in common with your roles as a supervisor and boss? I have worked with educators in many different countries to explore with them how this powerful idea can be employed to enhance their effectiveness as classroom managers, curriculum designers, building supervisors, mentors, tutors and teachers. An idea is like a tool. There is no "one right way" to use a wrench for fixing things but there are lessons that we can learn from the master mechanics who have dared to incorporate a new tool into their daily routines.

I have found that MI theory affirms the "good work" that quality educators everywhere have done naturally since time immemorial, but that it also expands the thinking of even the most seasoned and savvy classroom teachers. An idea is a mental tool that we can use to make subtle or explicit changes in attitude, verbal interaction, policies and procedures. MI is much like the idea of *democracy* where no one has a lock on exactly the right design or prescription for individuals or institutions to bring it to fruition. A powerful idea is like living with a growing organism. Everyday we graft our own ideas and innovations onto this basic theme that informs our perceptions, decisions, choices, judgments and plans.

I envision the implementation of MI in the workplace to evolve like a *spiral* that begins at the personal level in the mind of the manager and your perceptions of your employees, co-workers and the mission of your company. The next level expands into the minds of the people who are conducting the business and performing the tasks of your company. The third level is in the structure of the tasks themselves and their relationship to the objectives and goals of the company overall.

It is best to start a discussion of implementing MI at the personal level for both managers as well as workers. The idea of multiple intelligences can dramatically change the way you view your employees, colleagues, and even your friends and family. But, more importantly, it can change the way you view yourself and your role as "the boss." It can likewise change the way that employees view themselves as workers so that even the "unskilled" or "semi-skilled" workers can see that their tasks involve "intelligent

behaviors" that relate directly to the goals and values of your company. Let me explain how this change takes place in often subtle but sometimes dramatic ways.

When we think in terms of multiple intelligences the question changes from "How smart *are* you?" to "*How* are you smart?" This slight change in language shifts our thinking and opens us up to consider *multiple possibilities* rather than settling on a simplistic label such as "dumb", "brilliant", "dull" or "merely average." Instead of stamping a label on your forehead like an IQ number, MI encourages us to think carefully and descriptively about a full range of abilities evident in everyday life and work that have value. Think back to your elementary school days. In nearly every third grade classroom teachers daily reinforce the "intelligence hierarchy" so every child knows where he/she stands on the ladder of smartness. If you get an A on the math test it means you're smart but an A on the art project doesn't. A good reader is intelligent but the skillful dancer is not. If you can spell well then teachers will love you but the wisecracking class clown is "nothing but trouble and headed nowhere." The playground peacemaker goes unrecognized while the studious bookworm is praised.

Once out of the classroom these simplistic distinctions and predictions soon begin to fade when we are faced with solving a wide range of real life problems rather than boring textbooks, multiple choice tests and written assignments. As supervisors of adults we need to let go of our old third grade conceptions of "who's smart and who's not" and "who will be successful and who will not." We must ask ourselves- How different is our workplace from high school? Do the students who excelled in Algebra work well in the accounting department while football stars labor on the loading dock? Are cheerleaders good at public relations while editors of the school newspaper become excellent technical writers? Unfortunately, people in the real world don't always sort themselves out quite so neatly as these scenarios imply. Too often people are held back by high school stereotypes that pigeonhole them into positions that limit their potential development (and contribution to the company's goals). I believe that we must look beyond the myth of IQ in order to plan and manage for long-term professional and corporate growth.

However, it can be a difficult transition from an IQ to an MI-inspired viewpoint especially if we were among those students classified by our teachers (and peers) as "smart" based solely on our academic performance. As Howard Gardner has observed about teachers, we can all commit the "narcisstic fallacy." This means that we think- "If I am good at something then you should be too and if you're not then you're stupid." Unfortunately, it is all too often also true that we can brand ourselves as being inferior if our strengths lie outside the classroom (or workplace) so that they go unrecognized and under appreciated. The girl who is strong in the naturalist intelligence as evident in her extensive training of many pets may never consider for herself a future career as a scientist. The notion of multiple intelligences helps us to think "outside the academic box" of our simplistic, outmoded misconceptions about the true nature of intelligence and to come to recognize the potential of ourselves and other people.

There are a great many ways that MI can be applied to the tasks of work and daily life. Even after nearly 20 years we are all still learning and exploring. We are only

limited by our imagination and diligence. I will sketch a number of ways that you can use the MI perspective to maximize performance and create a work culture that is intrinsically motivating, that values creative problem-solving and that learns from its mistakes. One of the challenges in making the shift from IQ-based to MI-inspired thinking is that all too often we forget and resort back to previous habits developed during childhood. Aphorisms and pithy sayings are a time-tested means of giving life to worthy ideas so I'll frame the remainder of this article around several well-known sayings pertinent to the business of business.

Know Thy Self and then . . .

In order to Know Thy Self it is necessary to spend a little quality time navel gazing, as they say, and then get back to work! How can you get an objective assessment of your multiple intelligences strengths and weaknesses? How can you use this information to become an effective leader? For over 15 years I have been involved in the development and validation of an MI assessment that provides useful information and guidance. The *Multiple Intelligence Developmental Assessment Scales* (MIDAS) can be completed in about half an hour and then the resulting profile can be validated so as to produce a "road map" for personal and professional growth.

The tasks of an effective manager are many but a few of the vital qualities of a good leader are focused in the areas of linguistic skill, interpersonal effectiveness and intrapersonal management. A review of your MIDAS profile in comparison to the daily job requirements can be very revealing and point the way to maximize success or remediate areas of deficit. This "process approach" toward assessment is most effective when conducted in collaboration with people who know you well and has been popularized in the use of "360" performance evaluations.

To Thy Own Self Be True or It's All a Matter of Fit

Who is the right person to hire for a specific job? To answer this question we first need to conduct an MI job analysis and make a hierarchical list of the skills required for successful job performance. Most jobs require a few focused areas of strength with secondary and tertiary abilities. For example, it is not surprising that you want to hire an assembler with strong kinesthetic and spatial abilities because the job requires high levels of manual speed, dexterity and visual discrimination. If you need to find a line supervisor then common sense should tell you that you might not want to select the best performing assembler who is low in the linguistic, interpersonal and logical-mathematical abilities. Truly, success often depends upon the quality of fit between the individual and demands of the task.

The use of a MIDAS profile can enhance the interview and selection process. The MIDAS is a self-report and was not developed as an "evaluation" tool like a test. But rather, it provides a structured approach to conduct a "dialogue of discovery." As a seasoned professional manager you may have a keen insight into people and feel adept at "reading someone's character" but also having high intrapersonal awareness you are aware that carefully constructed instruments can enhance your success. When conducting an interview you may have a "gut feeling" that there is something just right (or very

wrong) about the interviewee's qualifications for the position but you just can't verbalize or pinpoint what it is. Everything on paper may look right (or wrong) but still...what is it that just doesn't seem to fit? What is it about the person's story that makes you think that their resume doesn't accurately depict their potential to do the job?

The MIDAS may be used as a stand-alone assessment or integrated into a testing and assessment battery during hiring and selection. A selection test battery typically includes interest inventories, personality, aptitude or achievement tests. These test results can provide one type of "standardized" information while the MIDAS process can provide a rich source of data about the person's past experiences, intellectual disposition and future aspirations. What combination of instruments that you choose to use depends primarily on the needs of your specific situation.

I have found that using The MIDAS profile in conjunction with one other test such as an interest inventory or achievement test related to the specific needs of the job to be a powerful combination. The goal, of course, is to obtain pertinent information as efficiently as possible so as you make the best decision or strategy for both the company and interviewee. The MIDAS "process approach" can fit into any selection procedure that suits your needs. It can be given as an initial "screening procedure" prior to testing or administered along with a test then followed up with an interview. What is of most interest to me is to first review the profile and compare key scales to the job's requirements. This preview often raises specific questions in mind about the person's skill profile, past experiences and future aspirations. Then I want to listen carefully as the interviewee describes how s/he thinks the profile's highs and lows relate to the job that is being applied for. These views can then be compared with the person's resume or other test results. Carefully listening to the reasoning, language and ideas expressed will reveal much about whole person that I can relate to the job requirements, work environment and company values.

The multiple intelligences are different from but often related to a person's academic skills, interests and personality characteristics as measured by the usual pencil and paper tests. This is too complicated a subject to adequately discuss here. Suffice it to say that an MI assessment should provide more information about a person's everyday thinking skills, creative problem solving, everyday enthusiasms as well as inter- and intrapersonal management skills.

An MI perspective receives much of its power to help us in daily life when we use MI language to carefully describe what we do and how we think. One teacher calls this "unpacking my thinking" so students can really understand how to perform the task. Novices or outsiders many times view skilled workers as "magicians". The MI language provides a means to pull back the black curtain and reveal mental and physical processes behind the magic. What is the logic used by accountants? What are the interpersonal cues that inform a mediator's actions? How does the scientist know what will happen when several chemical elements are combined in a specific sequence?

The more carefully that you are able to articulate the abilities required by the specific job then the more carefully you may listen for those qualities while a job applicant is discussing his/her MIDAS profile. This "dialogue of discovery" can take several different directions but I like to think in terms of *triangulation* as it is used for ship navigation. The first reading is of an applicant's past work experience (or the requirements of desired job), the second reading is of strengths and weaknesses revealed on the MIDAS profile. The third reading is the applicants explanation of how the profile relates to pertinent job experiences- both strengths as well as weaknesses. Taken together these three readings will reveal hidden obstacles or highlight important landmarks that may be lost in the fog.

Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You

Another important use for MI is personal / professional staff development. When I am working with someone to enhance their success the first step is simply to *recognize* their areas of strength. The second step is to *value* the potential of these strengths as a potent means toward achievement. The third and fourth steps are *support* and *challenge*. The fifth step is to reward and *celebrate* their achievements.

The procedures described above will tend to keep an employee engaged in the job. If, however, you want to keep an employee over a longer period of time then you will need to be concerned about his/her professional (and personal) skill development. Every workplace provides for annual performance reviews and goal-setting. This is SOP and is considered essential for every company. Is it working for you as a professional manager? Is it working for your employees? Is your supervisor able to support your professional goals? Do your aspirations fit with the ultimate goals and immediate needs of your company?

If your employment begins with a clear understanding of your MI profile then it will be easier to discuss your skill development goals in terms of the MI language and your profile. Using this language then makes it easier to describe how these skills will be used to perform "valued added" functions that are aligned with the company's needs. If you (or an employee) are feeling frustrated by your position then reviewing your MI strengths (as well as limitations) can point the way to resolving these difficulties. What should you do if you are not strong in an area that is necessary to your position?

Use Your Strengths to Overcome Weaknesses

The usual and traditional approach to education is what I call "hammering away at the weaknesses." This is also called "drill and kill." Teachers love this approach. If you're not good at addition then they give you extra math worksheets to do for homework. I agree that practice is necessary to improve skills but I also find it can be demoralizing and frustrating. What I advocate is the creative use of strengths to improve weaknesses.

Many years ago in graduate school I asked myself that important question, "How can I possibly pass my statistics examination?" You may be familiar with this dilemma. During high school math was my least favorite subject and thus I avoided it like the plague. I took the minimum classes necessary to graduate from high school. I pursued an

independent study bachelor's program where I dodged math successfully and during my master's program I elected to take qualitative research methods rather than quantitative. Thus, during my doctoral program I was faced with passing a statistic (or as I preferred to call it "sadicistics") examination after avoiding serious math classes for almost 20 years. Sound familiar? I was in a panic until I changed the question and asked myself: "How can I possibly use my linguistic strengths to learn statistics?" This opened up a full range of possibilities beyond the "drill and kill" activities that I had feared for a very long time. I ended up using every aspect of my linguistic intelligence that I could think of (note taking, speaking aloud, listening, story telling, and questioning) so that I eventually passed the exam on my first attempt.

Promote Teamwork

How can you arrange groups of employees to work together to accomplish a task? Sometimes you don't have much choice but if you do then it is advisable to, once again, highlight how each person's MI strengths contributes to the task's objectives. Publicly recognizing each project team member's unique strengths can promote a positive collaborative working attitude by everyone. Secondly, awareness of each person's weaknesses / limitations can help you to prevent breakdown in the group's progress. Of course, you would probably want to deal with these issues privately with each individual rather than risk public humiliation. For especially close working groups you might find that they spontaneously share among themselves both strengths as well as weaknesses. This is probably a good sign of a group's cohesiveness, compatibility and ability to naturally compensate for each other's preferences and shortcomings.

Know Your Customers

One of the keys to success for any performer is to know their audience and the same can be said for your "performance" as a manager. What does your boss expect? What do your clients / customers value? There are many ways to answer these questions but you might use the "MI lens" to anticipate their criteria for success. You can begin by doing an informal assessment of your "audience's" MI profile then compare this to your own profile and the characteristics of your product or service. Are they aligned or very different? If they are different, then your audience may appreciate your unique approach and perspective when you can relate it to what they value and typically receive.

It is important to keep in mind that all the different intelligences are merely tools that can be used to produce a wide variety and range of services and products. The musical intelligence can produce symphonic delights, head banging rap or mind numbing elevator Musak. Likewise your (or an employee's) keen interpersonal skills can be used to promote high motivation or provoke discord in the ranks. As I often advise dazed and bewildered college students who've yet to select their major- it's not necessarily how high your MI profile but how you choose to use what you've got. This is where the importance and power of the intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences is revealed for both your business and personal success. In an age of rapid turnover and keen competition it may be more important than ever that you use your head or loose it.

Perhaps it would be more apropos for me to suggest that you strive to use all 8 of your "heads" to better manage the challenges of your business day. Each of these different heads are tools that you already are using to some extent. Some are used with greater ease and frequency than others. They are like various types of software that your computer uses to help you to accomplish specific tasks. If you are thinking that it might be overwhelming to juggle all of these heads everyday then it might be easier for you to think in terms of selecting the right software at the time to do the job. Each new tool that you activate can provide you with a more power to solve problems, provide services and create products that have value. The following chart summarizes a few key strategies that you may keep in mind and refer to whenever you are in need of inspiration. Additional materials are available in books listed in the bibliography.

A Few Key Strategies

Intrapersonal

- ___ How do you feel about a situation?
- ___ What do you already know?
- ___ What are your goals and expectations?
- ___ How can you best manage and decrease your stress?
- ___ What do you need to do your job the best?
- ___ Remember to monitor your progress and seek out feedback.
- ___ How will you know if you have accomplished your objective?
- ___ Engage in post-mortem review of your project.

Interpersonal

- ___ Acknowledge feelings of people
- ___ Consider other people's viewpoints
- ___ Describe their expectations, needs and desires
- ___ Identify the strengths and weaknesses of other people involved
- ___ Describe salient personality characteristics
- ___ What do people already know about the situation / topic, etc.?
- ___ What negotiation strategies will help you deal with a situation?

Linguistic

- ___ Communicate in clearly written prose.
- ___ Use memorable phrases and define unfamiliar terms
- ___ What is the main theme or memorable story you have to tell?
- ___ Use persuasive speech or point-counterpoint debate
- ___ Take careful notes or use a tape recorder to record important ideas

Visual-spatial

- ___ Can you conjure a powerful image in the mind's eye of people?
- ___ When teaching use demonstration, visualization and sketching
- ___ Use evocative metaphors, analogies or exaggerated images to communicate
- ___ Use pictures, videos, Power Point, posters or props to communicate

Kinesthetic

- ___ Observe the message of listener's "body language"
- ___ Give listeners a stretch-break energizer (after 20+ minutes)
- ___ Can you use or encourage participants to use gestures or body movements?
- ___ When thinking through a problem role play or physically enact it.
- ___ Write your notes LARGE or over and over again

Musical

- ___ Incorporate a piece of music while working
- ___ Instruct with a song lyric / rhyme / haiku that captures your point
- ___ Modulate your voice quality to engage listener
- ___ Encourage employees to incorporate music into their work

Naturalist

- ___ Look for patterns in behavior or recurring problems
- ___ Wonder aloud how the problem or task nurtures life
- ___ Is there an animal / plant metaphor appropriate to your project / topic?
- ___ What are the ecological implications of your work?

Logical-mathematical

- ___ Explain a task or procedure step-by-step, in detail
- ___ Accentuate and highlight the logical progression of your ideas
- ___ Reveal cause and effect and relationships among ideas
- ___ Provide all pertinent statistics
- ___ Create a simple graph or chart to illustrate essential information
- ___ Collect data, compare and critique
- ___ Question, how, why and what

Existential Awareness

- ___ How does your project / task fit into the "Big Questions" of a person's life?
- ___ How does your idea contribute to the ultimate quality of life for the community or for future generations?
- ___ How does the project connect to ultimate values and goals of the company?
- ___ How does your company contribute in a meaningful way to the quality of life of the community?

Reference

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