



SOCIAL intelligence and you

Current employment trends emphasise that it's not what you know or who you know that gets you noticed, but how you deal with what and who you know

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In the 2006 satirical comedy *Idiocracy*, Luke Wilson's hapless character wakes up 500 years in the future, where anti-intellectual trends have created a society that lives up to the film's name. This is lampshaded in its approach to intelligence quotient (IQ) testing, which sees average IQ scores in the futuristic dystopia drop below the 100 mark — an impossible feat by current methodologies.

"In simple terms, what IQ does is it measures your general ability to solve problems. When it comes to emotional quotient (EQ), that's all about how you use emotion to facilitate a desired intrapersonal outcome or manage conflict, and there are IQ and EQ selection processes available now which measure applicant performance versus a norm group," says Kelly Outsourcing and Consulting Group (KellyOCG) Asia Pacific vice-president Anthony Raja Devadoss.

Despite its light-hearted premise, *Idiocracy* has its roots in several real-life incidents, notably the 2000 sanction of "intelligence quotient roofs" in the New London Police Department by the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals in New York. The case revolved around 49-year-old Robert Jordan, whose score of 33 in the Wonderlic Personnel Test (equivalent to an IQ of 125) was cited as a factor in the rejection of his application by the department.

The move addressed future turnover on the part of high-scoring applicants who were deemed at risk of "growing bored" with police work and leaving, despite substantial training costs. The court ruling found that the policy had a rational, if unwise basis in

law, on the grounds that everyone taking the test was subject to the same standards.

"Companies in Malaysia are already utilising IQ and EQ assessment tools as part of their recruitment processes. Recently, social intelligence quotients (SQ) have also come up, which act as an aggregate of self and social abilities, including evolved social beliefs and attitudes, and also the appetite to manage complexities in the social sphere," says Devadoss.

The rise of social intelligence quotients as performance indicators reflect a progressive understanding of the interplay between the individual, the community and the workplace, as well as the increasing tendency for lines between the three to become blurred in today's working environments — not so much a work-life balance as a work-life blend.

From this point of view, standardised intelligence assessments have formed the historical foundation for research into the psychology of human resource management, as seen in the Army Alpha and Army Beta tests implemented by the US military for candidates during World War I, some elements of which have persisted in its recruitment practices to this day.

Studies into emotional intelligence were the next step in the process, going beyond purely intellectual capabilities to measure how individuals managed their

emotions, as well as those of others around them. The social intelligence quotient thus represents a further maturation of the field, synthesising both IQ and EQ in the context of a larger society.

"SQ came up comparatively recently, in the last five years, and gives us a fuller perspective on the whole. Looking at it, we realised that there was a need to look at how SQ plays a role in the organisational and workforce readiness aspect of employment practice. It's not just about IQ or EQ anymore; you need to be prepared to work in an environment with other people, which makes social intelligence a definite necessity," says Devadoss.

The paradigm shift is especially relevant in Malaysia, where more than 41% of SMEs considered themselves socially intelligent in 2014, in contrast to the average of 18% in organisations across Asean. This is reflected in strong demand throughout the region for Malaysian talent, as industry perceptions highlight its adaptability, resilience and integrity, according to KellyOCG.

While emerging technologies such as social media platforms and mobile computing have played a large role in cultivating social intelligence in the country, Devadoss stresses that they are not the primary catalysts of SQ growth. If that were true, Malaysia would have little clout next to the Philippines, which remains the undisputed social media capital of the world, going by the 2014 Wave7 global study.

"People make things happen, not just projects, technologies, solutions or anything else out there. In order to move things forward and achieve, you need to have the right people in the right places, which is why there is a need to champion human resource leaders and CEOs," he says.



LEFT:
Employment psychology has moved beyond just IQ and EQ as performance indicators

BELOW:
Women are generally seen as having inherent strengths in the field of social interactions, and can be SQ assets for any enterprise



“SQ does correlate to the level of positions people are at. There’s a reason why there’s a demand in some areas where you’d need more interactions, for instance, how a senior manager interacts with workers, colleagues and so on, or how you get things done at the board level. Every employee in the organisation is important, and each forms the building blocks of success.”

Devadoss sees Malaysia’s inherent cultural diversity and multilingual approach to education as key factors in the rise of its socially intelligent organisations, as candidates experience and learn to overcome interpersonal differences from an early age. The formative

parts of the process begin at home, and are reinforced throughout various stages of education until they find fruition in the workplace.

The tendency for Malaysian SMEs to be “lean and mean” also encourages the growth of social intelligence, with smaller firms being better able to underpin its efficacy and thus benefit from it. By juggling many roles, the entrepreneur learns to see an issue from different points of view, allowing him to better fill the role of a mediator.

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Despite the roots of social intelligence as a learned behaviour, technology continues to have a large impact on its growth and pervasiveness, particularly as the costs of technology adoption become more competitive with time. Properly applied, mobile platforms and networks can act as multipliers for internal communication and coordination efforts, justifying their outlays.

“Tablets and hand-helds have become extensions of the communication process, and of people themselves. I would say it’s critical for companies and people to embrace them, and it would be futile to attempt any sort of growth without having that platform enabled. Rather than looking at it from the costs point of view, it should be taken as an investment,” says Devadoss.

In the context of the working environment, and in light of the recent International Women’s Day celebrations, it is also instructive to examine the relationship between gender and social intelligence, particularly in light of the latter’s hypothesised correlation with success in the workplace.

The question is especially relevant in the outsourcing and recruitment business, where women make up a large part of the upper echelons. Devadoss estimates up to 80% of KellyOCG as being female, citing the patience, knowledge, experience and resilience often found in their skill sets.

“There’s no gender bias when it comes to talent, but women do tend to have an advantage with regard to social interaction and intelligence. I’m not saying men are completely out, but I did wake up just this morning to a study that found men to be more narcissistic than our female counterparts. That was the headline. I mean, it’s out there, it’s public, right?” he laughs.

Perhaps the most intriguing finding of KellyOCG’s surveys is a possible correlation between the number of Gen-Y hires in an organisation and its resulting social intelligence ranking. The group found Gen-Y to be the most socially intelligent among workforce generations, with 76% of Malaysian SMEs preferring them in top management roles. ■

