

# Towards action intelligence: Strengthening subjectivity and integration in the action sciences

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## ABSTRACT

For simplicity of reference, and to acknowledge their commonality without denying their differences, the three areas of action inquiry, action learning, and action research will be covered by the plural umbrella term “action sciences” (NB this is somewhat distinct from the more specific use of the singular “action science” originally used by William Torbert (1976) and subsequently deployed by Argyris (1980) and Schön (1983) – see Friedman and Rodgers (2008) for a fuller account of the semantics). This paper argues that action inquiry is the least researched of the three action science areas and proposes lines of development that align with external trends and findings. Since the runaway success of Daniel Goleman’s development of “emotional intelligence,” there has been a series of attempts to find another adjective to describe intelligence with the same selling power – in terms of publishing and intellectual impact – as Goleman’s popularisation (he did not himself coin the term). From appreciative intelligence, (Thatchenkerry & Metzker, 2006), through cultural intelligence (Plum, 2008), and even risk intelligence (Apgar, 2006), theorists have tried to emulate Goleman’s success to little avail.

However the trend is not just fad without substance, and this paper argues that the substance in the trends derives from the application of findings in neuroscience. It makes two further contentions: the first that, while these findings are emerging in the action sciences, they bring with them a challenge to increase the attention on action inquiry because of their upward re-evaluation of the importance of emotions; and the second that, within some of the new “wannabe intelligences” there can be found useful, and somewhat neglected in the action sciences arena, methodological augmentations for the action sciences. Accordingly, the paper looks at what the action sciences might learn from an intelligent integration of aspects of emotional intelligence (and where and how it may be applied), appreciative intelligence, cultural intelligence, and risk intelligence. In addition it supplements these proposals by exploring the direct challenges and opportunities in the recent neuroscience research, or more accurately, in some of its textbooks and popularisations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps apologia would be a better heading than introduction. This is because, since submitting the abstract, our thinking has changed in ways that impact on the whole project and the abstract’s plan for this article. Accordingly, the nature of our concerns has changed significantly. Moreover, we have been unable to do much more than to sketch our conclusions. While continuing, as per the abstract, with our original re-definition of the Action Sciences as an umbrella term, and with learning from the rise of Emotional Intelligence and some of its potential successors, we have moved away from strengthening subjectivity in order to better explore three pathways.

The first pathway is the potential from those learnings for assisting the Action Sciences. In particular, we seek to consider the use value – for practical training and applications as well as conceptual clarity and wider business and social acceptance through increased visibility and easier applicability – in defining, and perhaps even trying to measure Action Intelligence (hereinafter AQ, in order to avoid using the abbreviation AI, which has too many prominent rivals such as AI for Appreciative Inquiry and AI for Artificial Intelligence) in terms of a series of benchmark competencies that may be cascaded into a markedly different level of performance. The second is to consider how AQ might connect with recent work on Global Citizenship and if that may connect productively with the Action Sciences. The third is to follow an alternative route and consider what might be gained from developing a core set of Action Intelligences plural building along the Howard Gardner’s framework of multiple intelligences.

## II. “THE NEW YARDSTICK”: GOLEMAN’S SUCCESS AND WOULD-BE SUCCESSORS

Goleman (1999) uses the phrase the new yardstick to promote the necessity of emotionally intelligent behaviour to achieve success across different aspects of business, leadership (Goleman, 1998; Goleman, 2000; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2001) and life. His target benchmark is IQ or Intelligence Quotient to measure intelligence. However, his popularisation of Emotional Intelligence, also set a new benchmark for runaway success in conceptual implementation. As advocates for the Action Sciences, we’d welcome such a spread of core ideas and practices. With that in mind, let’s take a look at aspects of the emotional intelligence phenomena.

One of the auguries of Goleman’s success was the increasing popularisation of findings in neuroscience, most notably LeDoux’s (1998) incisive finding that we feel before we think because currently “the amygdala has a greater influence on the cortex than the cortex has on the amygdala, allowing emotional arousal to dominate and control thinking” (p. 303). And Damasio (1994) book, *Descartes’ Error*, which opts for more consciously emotional responses because the residual (& wrong) Cartesian concept of a disembodied mind still obscures: “the roots of the human mind in a biologically complex but fragile, finite, and unique organism; ... [and] the tragedy implicit in the knowledge of that fragility, finiteness, and uniqueness. And where humans fail to see the inherent tragedy of conscious existence, they feel far less called upon to do something about minimizing it, and may have less respect for the value of life” (p. 250).

These capped a turning tide against a narrow rationalism that had always had detractors but which now had to confront hard science evidence. The growing awareness of that evidence helps to explain one startling fact about Goleman’s (1995) book’s sudden success and rapid spread: Goleman’s use of Emotional Intelligence was not the first, and indeed, under the term “social intelligence,” most scholars (see, e.g., the contributors in Bar-On & Parker, 2000a, *Handbook of Emotional Intelligence*) track it back to at least to constructs of intelligences in the 1920s (see Bar-On & Parker, 2000b, p. xii; Zirkel, 2000, p. 5; Hedlund & Sternburg, 2000, p. 137).

Rarely has such a runaway success of contemporary times been based on already existing terms that had already been reactivated in recent times in a series of 1990s academic journal articles in the early 1990s before the landmark publication of *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995). Mayer, DiPaolo, and Salovey’s (1990) “Perceiving affective content in ambiguous visual stimuli: A component of emotional intelligence,” Mayer and Salovey’s (1993) “The intelligence of emotional intelligence,” and Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) “Emotional intelligence.” However, in a later chapter involving two of the same journal authors, Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2000) captured the key term in the first part of their title: “Emotional Intelligence as Zeitgeist” (p. 92). It is as Zeitgeist that Emotional Intelligence has emerged and spread across fields and ages.

It is also in their bids to capture the next Zeitgeist that interest us here in consider those who seem to aspire to succeed Goleman as the new spirit of the age and runaway bestseller.

### III. WOULD-BE SUCCESSORS: APPRECIATIVE INTELLIGENCE AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

We start our brief survey of attempts to find another adjective to describe intelligence with the same impact as Goleman's popularisation. Our first contender is of considerable interest to allied movements in the Action Sciences. The foregrounding of appreciative intelligence in Thatchenkerry and Metzker's (2006) *Appreciative Intelligence: Seeing the Mighty Oak in the Acorn* resonates with substantial historical attempts to situate appreciative inquiry as essential to successful Action Research.

In the first edition of the *Handbook of Action Research* (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), Ludema, Cooperrider, and Barrett's (2001) build on earlier arguments:

that action research, especially in the guise of organizational development, has largely failed as an instrument for advancing "second order" social-organizational transformation (where organizational paradigms, norms, ideologies or values are changed in fundamental ways) because of its romance with critique at the expense of appreciation. (p. 189)

We agree with their chapter's conclusion that: "Appreciative inquiry recognizes that inquiry and change are not truly separate moments, but are simultaneous. Inquiry *is* intervention (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001, p. 198). Accordingly, we see Appreciative Inquiry as an integral and valuable part of the Action Sciences. However, we don't see Appreciative Intelligence as having the heft to succeed Emotional Intelligence. As well as their subtitle definition of *Seeing the Mighty Oak in the Acorn*, Thatchenkerry and Metzker (2006) define Appreciative Intelligence as "the ability to reframe a given situation, to appreciate its positive aspects, and to see how the future unfolds from the generative aspects of the present situation" (p. 4). This seems too much like core Action Sciences business to merit new yardstick status and, in the four years since its publication, Thatchenkerry and Metzker's (2006) book has not attracted a substantial following.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ), at least at first sight, seems a more promising model. Like Emotional Intelligence, it has a long history, and the attempt to seize a *Zeitgeist* moment is equally opportunistic. Cultural Intelligence's equivalent to the contemporary rise of neuroscience findings is commercial globalisation. The spread of interconnectedness from factors as diverse as cheaper travel, expanding international markets, and exponential rises in outsourcing, becoming so prevalent as to trigger a whole new way of thinking about traditional intercultural communication. One of the most influential publications was Earley and Mosakowski's (2004) *Harvard Business Review* article entitled "Cultural Intelligence," whose title was echoed both in Paterson's (2004) book *Cultural Intelligence: A Guide to Working with People from Other Cultures* and Thomas and Inkson's (2004) first edition of *Cultural Intelligence: People Skills for Global Business*. This followed up Earley's earlier, co-written with another author, book, *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Actions Across Cultures* and was followed by *CQ: Developing Cultural Intelligence at Work* (Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006). In the latest of these publications, Cultural Intelligence is defined as "a person's capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to culture context" (Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006, p. 5).

Just as Thatchenkerry and Metzker (2006) had done, Earley, Ang, and Tan (2006) explicitly position themselves in relation to Emotional Intelligence. They have had more success than the advocates of Appreciative Intelligence with an increasing number of books using either CQ and/or Emotional Intelligence in their titles such as Livermore's (2009) *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, Livermore's (2009) *Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The New Secret to Success*, and Thomas and Inkson's (2009) revised second edition *Cultural Intelligence: Living and Working Globally*. The last of these makes an interesting play to both imitate Emotional Intelligence in extending IQ and the use of a similar kind of measure, and to go beyond it by claiming that CQ adds a further capability:

You have probably heard of the psychologists' concept of intelligence, the ability to reason, and its measure, the intelligence quotient (IQ). More recently has come recognition of emotional intelligence, the concept that it is important how we handle our emotions. A measure of emotional intelligence is the emotional intelligence quotient (EQ). Cultural intelligence (or CQ as its measure might be called) is a relatively new idea that builds on these earlier concepts but that incorporates the capability to interact effectively across cultures. (Thomas & Inkson, 2009, p. 17)

Unfortunately for the claimants, neither the measures nor the concept have made any clear breakthrough to the Zeitgeist. While their use-by date is not near, their managing diversity approaches haven't caught any significant public imagination, nor, we predict, do they seem likely to do so in the near future. Nor do they seem to offer much additional learning to Emotional Intelligence other than the need to be more culturally aware and that has been a feature of the Action Sciences through their international reach with Bevans in Belgium and Egypt and business friendly experiences (see Boshyk, 2000, *Business Driven Action Learning: Global Best Practices*).

#### IV. CAN GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP BE CONVERTED TO GLOBAL INTELLIGENCE?

In the course of developing this article we came across Mark Gerzon's (2010) *Global Citizens: How Our Vision Of The World Is Outdated And What We Can Do About It*. While it didn't mention Goleman, more aspire to become the next intelligence, it did offer some stimulation about how the Action Sciences might develop. Although Gerzon (2010) does not use the intelligence approach, he does suggest a suggestive set of ascending competencies that align with the people-centred approach of the Action Sciences and their desire to create a better world, while simultaneously addressing aspects of neuroscience findings and globalisation.

Gerzon (2010) begins with a useful 2009 statement from Newt Gingrich's (2009): "I am not a citizen of the world. I think the entire concept is intellectual nonsense and stunningly dangerous" (cited in Gerzon, 2010, p. xi). Gerzon's book then counters that viewpoint through building up an ascending series of global citizenship steps. The first stage, he terms "Citizen 1.0:" to cover the intersection point with one's self – as an essential but not sufficient core of civic identity and *homo economicus*, the rational economic man who is still dominant in much thinking. This, following Gardner's notion of multiple intelligences might be seen as Global Intelligence 1 – it is also needed to make effective and sustained contributions to any action learning group.

Gerzon follows this with "Citizen 2.0," whose intersection point is with one's group, it can be tribe centred but identifies with a larger "us" that's subcultural. The subculture may be smaller than a nation, or a national grouping linked with a larger national grouping (e.g., Scots within Britain, or Catalans) or larger than some nations as Kurds that identify themselves as Kurds rather than Turks or Iraqis). This could be Global Intelligence 2, and might even be an appropriate way to consider the comrades in adversity who form action learning or action research teams.

Gerzon's "Citizen 3.0" has an intersection with a larger than individual or family or, sometimes, tribe in the "we" of a nation. This sense of national identity, like ego-centricity of Citizen 1.0, is also necessary but insufficient for a world facing global issues that transcend national boundaries and demand a willing surrender of some national sovereignty to address such challenges as climate change.

This is being picked up in some business thinking. Wood, Logsdon, Lewellyn, and Davenport's (2006). *Global Business Citizenship: A Transformative Framework For Sustainable Capitalism*, for instance defines a global business citizen (GBC) as "a business enterprise (and its managers) that responsibly exercises its rights and implements its duties to individuals, stakeholders, and societies within and across national and cultural borders" (p. 4). That includes human and environmental rights, fair access to education, health, and jobs.

To develop Citizens 1.0 & 2.0, EQ needs to be added to IQ and Gerzon's next level, "Citizen 4.0" has an intersection with multiple cultures (an Obama-like interdependency – less building bridges and more being a bridge). This could be covered by CQ. However, it is his ultimate level "Citizen 5.0," which involves intersecting with the whole earth (geocentric rather than anthro-centric) and involves a shift to wisdom as in Ghandi's "The purpose of life is . . . to know oneself. We cannot do so unless we learn to identify with all that lives."

At this point to unpredicted pressures we've been unable to develop our argument further but seek to present the Action Sciences as the best way forward for developing Global Intelligence similar to Citizen 5.0. And we see Citizen 5.0's Global Intelligence as the vision to enable the Action Sciences to make the breakthrough to the next popular intelligence.

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