

Moral Intelligence

On our website, you will find a selection of (hyphenated) – intelligence articles, and this is another in this series. However, I believe that the concept of Moral Intelligence deserves more than just a label as a variant of the several intelligences or competencies that have appeared in the last few years. In fact, I believe, and I attempt to suggest in this article, that the concept of Moral Intelligence may serve us as one of the frameworks for tying together different concepts of emotional intelligence into a coherent whole.

Moral Intelligence, developed to its fullest by Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel in their book of the same name, has more to do with values and behaviors than what we would think of as “intelligence”, or some raw concept of mental acumen such as IQ. As such, it is a potentially useful complement to the other forms of intelligence that have been identified, especially Emotional Intelligence, Cultural Intelligence, and Social Intelligence. [See articles on our website www.teaminternational.net .] Lennick and Kiel give full attention to these constructs, especially in the newer field of neuroscience, which is basically the impact of one individual’s brain on the others’ around it. But I will go further and say that Moral Intelligence, as presented here, can be seen as a summary of what leaders need to know, and to do, in order to be more effective in our relationships around the globe.

It helps understand their approach to this topic if we know a little about the principal author, Doug Lennick. Doug is currently managing partner of LennickAberman Group, a consulting and training company. However, he was formerly Executive VP of American Express Financial Advisors, now called Ameriprise. As such, he headed up an enterprise-wide effort to help Amex’s FAs be more attuned to their clients’ needs, and much more responsive, values-oriented, and ethical, in their financial planning advisory service with their customers.

I first came in touch with this approach through my own financial advisor, whom I tracked through his career with IDS, which later became AMEX Financial Advisors, and then Ameriprise. What I found with him was his constant attention to me and my family’s needs and priorities, following me through ups and downs in my business, and many wobbly personal economic times. During these difficulties, I frequently asked him to work with attorneys and accountants to provide needed information and advice; he was always ready to go the extra mile to make sure that my interests were served, even though my account with him might shrink in value at a given moment. In short, he became a reliable business friend and confidant, not just a financial advisor, i.e. a pretty good model for a leader.

This approach was apparently the stuff that drove the AMEX thrust in training and qualifying its financial advisors, led by Lennick and others in the firm. So my own personal experience made it easier for me to pay attention to his Moral Intelligence concept, rather than overlooking it in favor of one of the other intelligence foci.

The main elements of Moral Intelligence are not revolutionary, nor unfamiliar to students of the other intelligences. They are:

- *Integrity* – doing what is “right”, not just for me but for others [and perhaps even serving others’ interests before attending to own].
- *Responsibility* – being accountable for one’s actions and the consequences of those actions [even if the consequences were not intended].
- *Compassion* – caring about others [and creating a climate where people take care of those around them, customers and co-workers, and help when asked or even if not asked].
- *Forgiveness* – tolerance of mistakes and imperfection in ourselves and others [which does not mean lowered standards.] It also means tolerance and acceptance of others’ styles and opinions, when these do not coincide with our own – which does not imply weakness in our own convictions.]

I have added [in brackets] above some extensions of my own, which are consistent with Lennick and Kiel’s discussions throughout the book. As such, they align well with Goleman and other colleagues’ guidelines in Emotional and Social Intelligence. The matter of understanding the impact of what we do on others is key to all the intelligences mentioned. And this way of conceiving our particular moral place in the universe with others is a useful building block into making our impact more positive and powerful.

The authors interviewed over 100 leaders, including many CEOs of U.S. companies and “thought partners” well respected in the leadership field. Their book is rich with anecdotes and many real-world examples of leaders who provided examples, positive and not-so-positive, of the 4 moral intelligence elements above.

As I read through the Lennick and Kiel text, I find that the above elements and their extensions are also a bridge between what could be called “moral” and “ethical” principles. When I took Ethics 101 at the University of Colorado, the distinction was drawn between “morals” as being what you do, and “ethics” as being why you do what you do. In subsequent readings and discussions, what I think I have learned is that: Morals define personal character and behaviors, while ethics stresses a social system in which those morals are applied. In other words, ethics point to standards or codes of behavior expected by the group to which the individual belongs. This could be national ethics, social ethics, company ethics, professional ethics, or even family ethics.

Lennick and Kiel write about a “moral compass” that presumes to include both morals and ethics. Their discussion of the 4 elements of Moral Intelligence encompasses both what we do and why we do it; they suggest we question not only our own, but also our reference group’s connection to character and to the application of appropriate codes of behavior, whatever that group is – our profession, our company, or our family.¹ The authors provide descriptions of several ethical business environments – Thrivent Financial, Safeco, Ecolab, and, not surprisingly, Ameriprise. And there are the examples of unethical environments, including Adelphia, Mitsubishi, Lucent, and, of course the poster child of corporate immorality, Enron.

This a second building block in constructing a moral intelligence framework, and this is where I think Lennick and Kiel excel. Let’s consider no important differences between

“morals” and “ethics” – some authors have suggested that the words are really equivalent, one drawn from a Latin root and the other from the Greek. Perhaps, then, there is reason to cut through some of the distinctions between the different versions of intelligence and to consider Lennick / Kiel’s broad definition of moral intelligence, which is “...the ability to differentiate right from wrong as defined by universal principles....those beliefs that are common to all cultures around the world.” The question then becomes: What beliefs are common to all cultures around the world? And this query leads us to the 3rd and final block of the integration of intelligence approaches, cultural intelligence.

Luckily, we have at least an empirical answer to this last question, embedded in the materials that come out of series of studies called “Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness” and nicknamed “GLOBE”. The results are based on findings from over 17,000 managers in nearly 1,000 companies around the world.

Here are the positive leader characteristics found to be culturally “universal”:

Trustworthy
 Decisive
 Just
 Excellence-oriented
 Honest
 Dependable
 Foresighted
 Intelligent
 Plans ahead
 Effective bargainer
 Encouraging
 Win-win problem solver
 Positive
 Administratively skilled
 Dynamic
 Communicative
 Motive-arouser
 Informed
 Confidence- builder
 Coordinator
 Motivational
 Team-builder

The GLOBE study further cautions us that, within these characteristics, specific behaviors may differ from culture to culture. For example, a “decisive” leader in the U.S. may be expected to make quick and approximate decisions. In France or Germany, decisive may mean a more deliberate and precise approach to decisions. These are style differences not value differences, and both fit into a moral/ethical intelligence approach.

Now go back to the elements of Moral Intelligence of Lennick and Kiel above. Each and every one of the GLOBE characteristics maps rather easily into one or more of the 4 elements. If the mapping is not entirely clear, consider the GLOBE characteristics that inhibit leadership effectiveness:

Loner
 Irritable
 Asocial
 Egocentric
 Indirect/Non-explicit
 Ruthless
 Non-cooperative
 Dictatorial

So what we have in Moral Intelligence, I believe, is a kind of a synthesis of what we think we know about many principles and behaviors of effective leadership in organizations around the planet. This nexus can help us integrate other views of intelligence that have been presented over the last few years, and can be borne out in behaviors that we can adopt into our growth and development plans as leaders around the world.

Here's an example of the application of Moral Intelligence to a real case:

I was working a few months ago with an executive who was troubled by the results of his 360° report in the area of building and leading a team. Scoring low in "leading employees" and "confronting problem employees", by his respondents, and especially by his direct reports, he was searching for a way to be, in Lennick/Kiel's terms, "Compassionate" and yet "Responsible". As we worked through his feedback file, it appeared that the problem was not in either of these categories – it was rather in the area of "*Integrity*". He was seen to be more focused on his own opinion and image than sensitive to others' well-being. He was not taking a stand (being "*Responsible*") for what was right for the company nor for the people involved.

I frequently get some version of the following question from busy executives in our leadership programs, both in the U.S. and Latin America: "Noel, can you recommend one book I can read to sort through what I need to know to be more effective in my leadership behaviors? My answer might be: "...well, read a lot more, but try *Moral Leadership* by Lennick and Kiel if you want to get to a summary or nexus of behaviors, attitudes, and values that go to the core of your personal leadership development plan...."

¹See also the article on our website What, Exactly, is Authentic Leadership? and the work of Bill George.

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