

# The New Leninism

*The Left is using the notion of Emotional Intelligence to argue that everyone is intellectually equal.*  
By Neil Seeman

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The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) was first introduced in the late 1980s. After an inauspicious beginning on the fringe of academe, EI emerged as the chief artillery in the Left's new assault on conventional wisdom. Its proponents support a zealously egalitarian view of intelligence.

There are many intelligences, it is claimed, and traditional IQ scores measure only one of them. Including EI in the overall reckoning tends to even the score, making every-one essentially equal. It is, in a nutshell, the new Leninism.

Daniel Goleman, the best-selling author of *Emotional Intelligence* and the more recent *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, claims EI "is increasingly applied in choosing who will be hired and who will not, who will be let go and who retained, who passed over and who promoted."

EI has thus become the rage in the business world, where the concept has spawned a burgeoning cottage industry of consultants and manuals and videotapes. Prestigious companies such as British Airways and Crédit Suisse have become reverent devotees of the 'soft skills' that EI celebrates. Most large companies have employed psychologists to aid them in identifying, training and fast-tracking leaders into executive positions.

Alas, they are wasting their time. Businesses and educators that rely on these tests, to the exclusion of traditional IQ tests, are unwitting pawns in the Left's illiberal agenda. EI tests are meant to present a counterfoil to the sad fact that not everyone is intellectually equal.

What's more, even if EI does exist, it's a slippery thing to measure. As pointed out by Eva Fisher-Bloom, an Ottawa psychotherapist currently completing her doctoral dissertation

on EI, if emotional intelligence contributes to the broader concept of global intelligence, it makes little sense to measure it through self-reporting.

Toronto's Multi-Health Systems, the North American leader in EI testing, uses a self-report questionnaire. Think what would happen if, for instance, vocabulary were assessed by simply asking people if they believed they had a good vocabulary. Any test of emotional intelligence should test targeted aptitudes in the same way IQ tests do — by asking objective questions, which are evaluated by a third-party observer.

Contrary to what proponents of EI will tell you, bona fide psychometrics hasn't changed much since Alfred Binet devised a test at the turn of the century to predict which French children would succeed or fail in school. The instruments we now use measure essentially the same aptitudes — memory, vocabulary, spatial comprehension, and the ability to draw analogies and solve puzzles — because these are the skills historically associated with success in school and in the workplace.

Not incidentally, the most thoroughly documented evidence of the link between traditional intelligence and occupational success comes from the same book that attracted more scurrilous academic criticism from the Left than anything ever published in the English language: *The Bell Curve*.

Although its release was met with a barrage of (generally spurious) accusations of 'racism' — only a very small portion of their work dealt with intelligence differentials among ethnic groups — the thesis of the first half of *The Bell Curve* has never been discredited: namely, that U.S. society, over the past half-century, has become increasingly meritocratic. In other words, wealth and other positive social

outcomes have become more and more distributed according to people's intelligence, and less and less according to their social backgrounds.

While scientists may disagree about the extent to which intelligence is an inherited trait rather than a result of environment and upbringing, there is near-consensus around the idea that IQ is a measurable quantity. By contrast, the idea of emotional intelligence has proven powerful not because it is measurable or predictive of anything worth aiming at, but because it melds with the postmodern values and presuppositions of the educational establishment of the neo-liberal culture.

Asked in 1998 for hard evidence proving the link between EI and job performance, a Multi-Health representative could point only to a master's thesis by a graduate student in the Philippines.

The actual inventors of the concept estimate that EI accounts for as little as 5% of an average person's occupational achievement. They contend that many of the new EI enthusiasts are charlatans who have exploited a concept that was supposed to measure a specific set of abilities unrelated to general intelligence.

In fact, there is no solid research showing that EI is a stand-alone variable distinct from personality, or that people with supposedly high EI scores benefit from better mental health.

So, if they want to help their students, teachers are best advised to focus on reading and arithmetic. And if corporate managers want to get serious about improving the productivity of the workforce, they would do well to focus their efforts away from pop personality markers and toward remedying functional illiteracy, a scourge that plagues 10% to 20% of the population.

*(Adapted with permission from the National Post, July 26, 1999)*