

Intelligence and success in life

Characteristics of successful people

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By Claus Møller

*Our society worships success – but without giving much thought to **how** it was achieved.*

Tom Peters has told us what it takes to become a successful company. Warren Bennis has suggested what it takes to be a successful leader. This article deals with what it takes to be a successful individual in general.

Intelligence and success in life

It has been proven time and time again that good marks in school do not guarantee success in life after school. In recent years a number of researchers of human intelligence (Howard Gardner, Robert Sternberg, Reuven Bar-On, Claus Møller, Peter Salovey, John Mayer) have clearly reiterated the limitations of the “old” way of looking at intelligence – the IQ way.

At school we do not learn how to meet the challenges in the world of emotions or how we become more creative, how we identify and solve real life problems or how we make better decisions. The School system still focuses on “cognitive intelligence” and aims at developing abilities and skills measured by IQ (intelligence quotient). IQ has little to do with how successful we are in life. IQ is a measurement of “inert intelligence”. Inert means “unable to move or act.... not readily reactive with other elements”. Inert intelligence is what you show when you take an IQ test or a similar test used for university or graduate-school admissions. What counts in real life is applied intelligence that leads to goal-directed movement or action.

In 1958 Wechsler came up with his famous definition of **general intelligence**: “*One’s overall capacity to think rationally, act purposefully and deal effectively with one’s environment*”. General intelligence includes the ability to adapt to new conditions and to successfully cope with life situations. General intelligence has two components:

1. **Cognitive intelligence**: “*the ability to learn new things, recall information, think rationally, apply knowledge, and solve problems*” (Kaplan & Sadock 1991).
2. **Emotional and social intelligence (non-cognitive intelligence)**: “*An array of emotional, personal, and social knowledge and abilities that influence one’s overall ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures.* (Bar-On, 1997)

The concept of emotional and social intelligence addresses the emotional, personal, social, and survival dimensions of intelligence, which are often more important for day-to-day functioning than the more cognitive aspects of intelligence. This part of intelligence is concerned with understanding oneself and others, relating to people as well as adapting to and coping with the immediate surroundings. This increases one's ability to be more successful in dealing with the demands of daily life. Emotional and social intelligence, also referred to as emotional intelligence or simply **EI**, is **tactical** intelligence which is important for immediate functioning, while cognitive intelligence is more **strategic** forming a part of one's long-term capacity. It takes cognitive intelligence to figure out how to build a bridge. It takes EI to deal with the workers who has decided to go on strike. EI helps to predict success because it reflects how a person applies knowledge of a personal and interpersonal nature to the immediate situation. In a way EI can be thought of as "common sense" and one's ability to get along in the world. EI is a special capacity which determines how well we are able to make use of the other skills we possess. A great deal of evidence exists that shows that people with good emotional and social capacity – who know their feelings well, are in control of them and can read other people's feelings and deal with them effectively – have an advantage in most aspects of their personal and professional life. People with highly developed emotional and social skills are generally happier with life and are often more productive. People who are not in control of their emotions, fight internal struggles that inhibit their ability to think clearly and concentrate on their work.

In their book *Heart Work – improving personal and organisational effectiveness by developing and applying Emotional Intelligence – "EI"* Claus Møller and Reuven Bar-on take the readers through a basic understanding of what emotional intelligence is, why it is important for the individual and for organisations, and how to improve it and apply in the workplace and in people's personal lives. Heart Work adds a new dimension to other known EI approaches by pioneering and launching the concept of "Organisational EI".

In addition to emotional and social intelligence, what really matters in life in accordance with Robert Sternberg is **Successful Intelligence**: "What it takes to live a successful life". It is the kind of intelligence that matters to everyone in reaching important life goals. To be successfully intelligent is to think well in three different ways: analytically, creatively and practically. Of these three kinds of intelligence, typically only analytical or cognitive intelligence (together with linguistic intelligence) is valued in school. However, in life after school creative and practical intelligence may be more useful. The three aspects are related. Analytical intelligence is required to solve problems and to judge the quality of ideas. Creative intelligence is required to formulate good problems and generate ideas in the first place. Practical intelligence is needed to use the ideas and their analysis in an effective way in one's everyday life. Successful intelligence is most effective when it balances the three aspects. It is more important to know **when** and **how** to use the analytical, creative and practical aspects of successful intelligence than just to have them. Successfully intelligent people do not only have abilities – they reflect on when and how to use them.

Obstacles to the development of successful intelligence

In accordance with Robert Sternberg, the three major obstacles to the development of successful intelligence are negative expectations, own flagging of self-efficacy, and lack of role models.

Negative expectations

One of the biggest obstacles to the development of successful intelligence is negative expectations on the part of the authority figures. When teachers, administrators, parents, or employers have love expectations, they often get from an individual what they expect. To be successful it is important to know when to accept advice but equally important to know when to reject it.

Successfully intelligent people defy negative expectations. They do not let other people's assessments stop them from achieving their goals. They find the path and then they pursue it, realising that there will be obstacles along the way and surmounting these obstacles is part of their challenge.

Own flagging of self-efficacy

A second big obstacle to successful intelligence is one's own flagging of self-efficacy. It is not just other people's negative expectation that can get in the way. These expectations can be contagious and ultimately rob a person of working up to his or her own potential for success.

Successfully intelligent people are self-efficacious. They have a can-do attitude. They realise that the limits to what they can accomplish are often in what they tell themselves they cannot do, rather in what they really cannot do.

Lack of role models

A third obstacle to the realisation of successful intelligence is lack of role models. Successfully intelligent people can often point to one or several powerful people in their lives who have helped them fulfil their potential. Or in many cases, turn off the path to failure and onto the path of success. It's not enough just to have such people in their lives. What makes the difference is that they make the most of what is offered.

Successfully intelligent people actively seek out role models. Throughout their lives, they may have several such models, and their own success represents a unification of the best attributes of the various models. In other words, they do not slavishly follow one model but rather form their own distinctive identity. They also observe people who fail, and note why they fail, and then make sure they do things differently.

Characteristics of successfully intelligent people

During my 30 years career as a management consultant and coach, I have met many successful people - individuals who have set ambitious goals and met them. I have learnt that people who are considered successful by their own and others' standard have faced many failures in life as well. I have learnt a lot from successful people's successes and failures and those of my own.

The only true test of successful intelligence (*what it takes to live a successful life and reach important life goals*) is successful performance. However, like beauty, success is a relative term. It will be evaluated differently by different people. Many factors contribute to the success of an individual:

- The person's professional educations, skills, and experience
- The person's degree and combination of intelligences: Cognitive/analytical, emotional/social, practical, creative, linguistic, musical, spatial, and bodily intelligence
- Time, place and environment
- The person's health/fitness
- The actual situation
- The person's attitude and "thinking style"
- "Luck"

Even so, I have found that successfully intelligent people have many things in common, whatever the degree or nature of their success. Sternberg's research confirms this. He has come to similar conclusions as I have and suggests that especially 20 characteristics and attributes can lead to success. The following characteristics of people who have a potential for being successful and making a difference represent a mixture of EI components and what I call "time manager skills", "personal quality skills", and "employee skills".

1. Successfully intelligent people motivate themselves

It hardly matters what talents people have if they are not motivated to use them. In many situations, motivation counts at least as much as intellectual skills in achieving success. People within any given environment tend to represent a relatively narrow range of ability but a much broader range of motivation. Motivation thus accounts for individual differences in success. For some people motivation will come from **external** sources like the approval of colleagues, the desire for recognition or monetary rewards etc. For some people motivation will be **internal**, stemming from their own satisfaction with their performance. We all will be both internally and externally motivated, but in different proportions. Whatever the source of motivation, it is critical to success. We must want to succeed. The environment may or may not provide motivation. Often we have to find ways to motivate ourselves. External sources of motivation tend to be short-lived. Therefore, it is preferable for our motivation to be internally, rather than externally generated. People who are primarily externally motivated are likely to lose their motivation when those external rewards diminish or disappear. Internally motivated people are able to maintain their motivation beyond the comings and goings of external rewards. Successfully intelligent people combine internal and external motivation. They find ways of getting external rewards for the work they are internally motivated to do.

***Self-motivation** is described in **Heart Work** as one of 15 components included in Claus Møller's EI concept. Self-motivated people tend to be optimists. They look at the brighter side of life. They expect the best outcome, even in the face of adversity. They have achievement drive and strive to realise their potential. They have a positive approach to life and tend to enjoy it. They have the attitude: "What is worth doing is worth doing well". Studies suggest that only 20% of people are naturally self-motivated. This means that 80% of us are rather dependent on the recognition and encouragement we receive from others. Without it we lose our motivation. We cannot motivate other people, we can only motivate ourselves. However, we can inspire others and we need to do this constantly as managers, parents, spouses, and teachers if we want our employees, children, partners and students to be motivated to bring out their best.*

2. Successfully intelligent people control their impulses

Sometimes impulsive behaviour is unavoidable and may even be necessary, but it tends to hinder rather than enhance intellectual work. Impulsiveness as a habit may get in the way of optimal performance because it may prevent us from using our full potential in real life problem solving. While endless reflection may be an obstacle in achieving our goals, we should not get carried away by the first solution that comes to mind when we try to solve a problem. Better solutions may arise after further thought. Successfully intelligent people may act swiftly in solving problems and making decisions, but usually only in familiar situations. Successful people are normally acting from experience, not on impulse. In new situations, they take the time to think through a problem or decision.

***Impulse control** is described in **Heart Work** as one of 15 components included in Claus Møller's EI concept. People with impulse control are able to manage disruptive emotions and impulses. They can make their emotions work for and not against them. They have the ability to control abusive, hostile and aggressive behaviour and they can delay gratification. They don't lose their temper or have difficulty controlling their anger. Effective impulse control is vital for coping with everyday life. Mastering this fundamental skill is the key to getting along with ourselves and others. It is essential in developing good problem solving skills and successful negotiation of difficult situations. It helps avoid the temptation to act prematurely, and enhances the ability to remain patient and wait for the right opportunity to maximise one's success. Impulse control allows time to be empathic and accurately read social cues. This, in turn, provides valuable input to determine the most appropriate behaviour when dealing with people in private life and at work. It is the ability to know when and how to act rather than be acted upon. From an organisational point of view, people with low impulse control may have a negative effect on problem-solving and strategic planning. Not being able to control impulses may lead to quick but not necessarily accurate decisions, with potentially negative effects for the organisation. Problems of aggressive or abusive behaviour in the work place are based on low impulse control.*

3. Successfully intelligent people know when to persevere

Some people give up too easily if things do not immediately go their way, or if their first attempt to accomplish something fail. The least frustration is enough to keep them from persevering. A common characteristic among successful people is perseverance. They realise that success may come only after many frustrations and failures. Some people go too far in their perseverance. They continue to work on a problem long after it is clear that they will not be able to solve it. Or, they may basically have solved the problem, but they go on to solve again and again. Successfully intelligent people persevere, but when it becomes clear that they are making no progress, they know it is time to quit.

Perseverance is an important element in Claus Møller's "Time Manager Philosophy" and his special approach to "implementation" as described in "The Key to Personal Effectiveness" and "Employeeeeship". People who can implement realise that they will be faced with obstacles on the way to the goals. They try to imagine what problems may arise and to anticipate them. They tend to see problems as challenging tasks and a natural part of life rather than stressful elements. They have learnt to "expect the unexpected".

4. Successfully intelligent people make the most of their abilities

During their lives many people become aware that they are not particularly well suited to their jobs. Many people find themselves in one career or line of education and come to the conclusion that their real abilities lie in other areas. When they realise that they are not making the most of their abilities in the present situation it may lead to them choosing another education or career. Successfully intelligent people have often explored a number of options before they find the career path in which they have the greatest ability and in which they will be able to excel. Successfully intelligent people know their strengths and capitalise on them.

*Making the most of one's abilities is described in **Heart Work** as one of 15 components included in Claus Møller's EI concept. It is called **self-appraisal** (or self-regard) and it represents a cornerstone in emotional and social intelligence. People with self-appraisal are aware of, understand, accept, and respect themselves. They know their inner resources, strengths and weaknesses, and understand why they think, feel, and behave the way they do. They actively try to capitalise on their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. They accept their own perceived positive and negative attributes as well as their limitations and possibilities and realise that no one is good at everything. People with self-appraisal tend to have high self-esteem and a strong sense of self-identity. They typically feel positive of themselves and are open to constructive criticism, new perspectives and self-development. Self-appraisal is the biggest predictor of success for people who want to establish and run their own company. Individuals and organisations suffering from poor self-regard come up with inappropriate defence mechanisms to protect their self-esteem and avoid a sense of failure. This reaction can create an emotional virus that compromises emotional health and corporate performance.*

5. Successfully intelligent people translate thought into action

Some people are unable to translate their thoughts and ideas into action. No matter how good their ideas are, they rarely seem able to do anything about them. People who have good ideas and make good decisions, but are unable or unwilling to act upon them, will never benefit from them, whatever their level of intelligence. Successfully intelligent people have good ideas but also the ability to act on them. They put their ideas into action!

Translating thought into action is the foundation of Claus Møller's "Time Manager Philosophy". Success is about achieving goals. To achieve goals you must define your goals clearly as desired end results. Then you have to list the actions and tasks that will lead you to the desired situation and finally spend your time and energy on them instead of all the things that do not really matter.

6. Successfully intelligent people have a “product orientation”

Some people are more concerned about the process by which things are done than by the resulting product. Yet it is primarily on the basis of our produced end results that our accomplishments are judged. Successfully intelligent people are concerned with the process, but their ultimate focus is on the **product** – the desired end result. They simply want results.

*Having a “product orientation” is described in **Heart Work** as one of 15 components included in Claus Møller’s EI concept. It is called **achievement drive**. People with achievement drive have a good idea of where they are going, or want to go and why. They are goal-oriented, with a high drive to meet their objectives and standards. Achievement drive is an ongoing, dynamic process of striving towards maximum development of one’s abilities, capabilities, and talents. This factor is associated with persistently trying to do one’s best and trying to improve one in general. This leads to feelings of self-satisfaction. The need and drive to achieve is one of the strongest factors that distinguish stars from average performers. Achievement drive represents a sense of direction, purpose and meaning. Strength in this area leads to a sense of meaning beyond materialistic measures of success. According to Viktor Frankl, the sense of meaning is the most important driving force in life. Weakness in this area is associated with a sense of emptiness and lack of direction, purpose, dream, and vision.*

7. Successfully intelligent people complete tasks and follow through

Some people are “non-completers”. Whatever they begin they will never finish. Nothing in their lives ever seems to come to a close. Some people seem afraid to finish things because they do not know what to do with themselves next. Or they are so overwhelmed with the details of a project that they are unable to progress. Successfully intelligent people get where they want to go. If their goal is to solve a problem or make a decision, they will follow through once they have reached their goals.

*Completing tasks and following through is an integral part of the “**Time Manager**” concept as well as the “**Employeeship**” concept. Claus Møller calls it “implementation” or “scoring goals”. Successful people tend to adopt effective working habits like not starting projects that they cannot complete and not initiating things without implementing them and without following through.*

8. Successfully intelligent people are initiators

Many people are unwilling or unable to initiate projects. They wait to be told what to do or they think over ideas again and again without ever making up their minds about which project to pursue. People’s lack of initiative often comes from a fear of commitment. Many people fail to initiate relationships for fear of becoming too committed. As a result their relationships are superficial and short-lived. Business people who succeed in one company may not be particularly successful when they move to another company. People who are used to success in an old environment may just sit back and wait for it to come in a new environment. To achieve success in a new environment people have to prove themselves again. The more competitive the environment, the more people have to make things happen rather than wait for them to happen. They have to initiate and commit themselves to the task at hand. Successfully intelligent people take initiatives to solve problems, improve situations or find new solutions in all aspects of life.

***Initiative** is one of the 11 key factors in Claus Møller's "Employeeeship" concept: what it takes to be a good employee and to be employable. You can take initiative in three areas: **running** (getting things to function in day-to day life), **improving** (making what you do faster, better, cheaper more creatively), and **innovating** (doing something that has not been tried before – breaking new ground). Many people can "run a company". Some people can "improve a company". Few people can "innovate a company". In a company with an Employeeeship culture, staff can do more than run the company. Middle managers can, as a minimum improve the company and top managers can innovate the company.*

9. Successfully intelligent people are not afraid to risk failure

Many people fear failure. This seems to start early in life. Possibly low achievers fear failure because they have experienced too much of it. Some high achievers may not have learned to accept occational failures as a normal part of learning. Fear of failure has been linked to low levels of achievement drive. In contrast, those with a high need to achieve tend to undertake tasks that have moderate levels of risk, tasks in which they have a good chance but no certainty of succeeding. If we always encourage young people to get the highest grade, we may discourage them from seeking challenges that are optimal for their level of possible accomplishment. Many young people are unwilling to undertake projects for fear of failure. As a result they do not realise their full potential. Later on in their work life they may, unless certain of success, shy away from projects that could really make a difference to their career. Making mistakes is not equivalent to failure. We all make mistakes and it is usually a good indication that we have not thought a problem through or have made a hasty decision – we have more work to do to get it right next time. Successfully intelligent people make mistakes, but not the same mistake twice. They correct their mistakes and learn from them. And if they experience failure, they learn from that too.

*Claus Møller's quality management approach includes the concept of "**creative mistakes**". It is useful to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable mistakes. Acceptable mistakes are "creative mistakes". They are unavoidable when you experiment and test new ground. They are a sign of development initiative and should sometimes be rewarded! Unacceptable mistakes are "sloppy mistakes". They are unnecessary, expensive and may severely damage the "brand" of the company, its products, services and people.*

10. Successfully intelligent people don't procrastinate

Procrastination is a universal fact of life. We all, at some time or another, put off until later things we know should be done now. Procrastination is a serious problem when it is a uniform strategy in our ways of doing things. Procrastinators look for little things to do in order to put off doing the big things. They somehow manage to get their daily work done but take forever before tackling the important projects that could make a real difference in their work and personal life. Procrastinators are always busy and pressed for time, because they put things off until the last possible minute. Many students start studying for a test the night before or postpone a written assignment until a day before it is due. Later in work life they bring along this bad habit of procrastination. Richard Wagner and Robert Sternberg studied procrastination in the business world. They found that less senior executives had a variety of strategies for fighting procrastination. More senior and more successful executives did not have them, for the simple reason that they had no need for such strategies. Perhaps that is part of what made them both senior and successful. Successfully intelligent people are well aware of the penalties for procrastination. They schedule their time so that the important things get done – and done well.

Claus Møller's Time Manager Philosophy deals with procrastination. Important tasks that are normally postponed are the big ones that are "only" important – not urgent. They are "elephant tasks" like learning a new language, writing a book, developing a new product, losing weight, making a new filing system or repairing a damaged relationship. They are overwhelming and they seem to need no immediate action. They become New Year's resolutions and many people have the same each year. It is possible to "eat an elephant" if you take one bite at the time. It is highly recommendable to allocate time for eating bites of an elephant task each day, week, month, and year in addition to the day-to-day work.

11. Successfully intelligent people accept fair blame

The inability to handle blame in an appropriate way can seriously damage our relationships and keep us from achieving our goals. Some people feel they can do no wrong and look for others to blame them for even the smallest mistakes. Some people blame themselves for everything, even if they are in no way responsible. Successfully intelligent people accept responsibility, when something has gone wrong, if it is their fault. They don't make excuses for themselves or try to put the blame on someone else. And they expect others to do the same. Successfully intelligent people realise that a candid admission that you are in the wrong is the first step in getting it right next time.

Accepting fair blame is essential to personal development and service quality. Claus Møller has developed a whole concept around this issue: "A Complaint is a Gift". A complaint from a customer is normally a fair blame. The way a company processes complaints from customers (external as well as internal ones) is of vital importance to the customer's perception of the quality of the company, its products, its services, and its people. Eventually the way the complaint is handled will often decide whether the customer stays a customer or finds another supplier. Claus Møller suggests that a complaint should be considered as a gift and treated accordingly. Complaining customers tell the company that they are not satisfied and give the company a chance to repair the damage and disappointment – instead of just finding another supplier. They should be thanked for that. Processing complaints effectively may even lead to a better relationship with the customer than before the dissatisfaction occurred. It often leads to customer loyalty which is the basis for the company's survival. Individuals are also better off when they consider complaints as gifts and an aid to improve and avoid the same mistake again. Everyone ought to be happy when others discover their mistakes – and say "thank you" instead of defending themselves.

12. Successfully intelligent people reject self-pity

When things do not come our way it is difficult not to feel sorry for ourselves. But constant self-pity may be a major obstacle to success. Self-pity for whatever reason is a barrier to doing good work – and it is no excuse for doing bad work. Successfully intelligent people have no time for self-pity. If they feel that they have been wronged or put at a disadvantage, they immediately try to remedy the situation.

*Rejecting self-pity is closely related to being a **proactive** as opposed to being a **reactive** person as described in “**Heart Work**”. Proactive people act. Reactive people are acted upon. Proactive people realise feel responsible for their own lives. Their behaviour is a function of their decisions, not their conditions. They take the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen. Responsibility can be interpreted as “respons-ability” – the ability to choose our response in terms of mood and behaviour. Proactive people recognise this responsibility. They do not blame circumstances, conditions and conditioning for their behaviour or situation. They do not feel sorry for themselves. Their behaviour is a result of their own conscious choice. Reactive people choose to let their feelings, moods and behaviour be controlled by stimulus from outside. They blame everyone else for their lack of success. They think that someone or something in their environment is responsible for their situation. They seem to be conditioned to respond in a particular way to a particular stimulus. When things don’t come their way, they feel very sorry for themselves. Reactive people are driven by feelings, by circumstances, by conditions and by their environment. Proactive people are conscious or unconscious driven by their own values and their own value-based choice or response. Proactive people realise that what happens to us is not what hurts us. It is our reaction to what happens to us that really hurts us.*

13. Successfully intelligent people are independent

In most of the tasks people face, they are expected to acquire a certain degree of independence. In school and in their careers people are expected to work independently and think for themselves. Many people rely on others to tell them what to do, and in cases show them how to do it. Without such aid, they are at a total loss. People who do not work independently often have to seek less responsible jobs, or they never do as well as they should in the jobs they have. Successfully intelligent people rely primarily on themselves and are independent in their thinking and decision-making. They know that the best way to get something done is either by doing it themselves or by taking responsibility for someone else’s getting it done. Successfully intelligent people do not expect others to take on responsibilities that are theirs.

*Being independent is described in **Heart Work** as one of 15 components included in Claus Møller’s EI concept. It is called **self-reliance** (or emotional independence) which is the ability to function autonomously versus needing protection and support. People with self-reliance are independent in their thinking and behaviour and free of emotional dependency. They avoid clinging to others in order to satisfy their needs and they need no or little approval of others. They are the free thinkers that can be an asset to any organisation. The balance that is necessary to keep this strength in perspective is a sense of humility to avoid arrogance. Weakness in this area can freeze us in our tracks, individually or as a group, and make us afraid to take the risks associated with movement and development. A profound need for the approval of others, constant need for validation and rechecking can be irritating to others, especially for those who possess high levels of self-reliance and don’t have this need for validation. A healthy sense of self-reliance or emotional independence is necessary in today’s business world. However, this is in co-operation with an interdependence upon others, rather than dependence upon them.*

14. Successfully intelligent people surmount personal difficulties

Inevitable, people will have personal difficulties in the course of their lives. We can all expect some real joys, but also some real sorrows. The important thing is to try to keep both the joys and the sorrows in perspective. Some people let personal difficulties interfere negatively with their work. Major life crisis will almost always have some effect, whether we like it or not. But the best thing is to accept that this will happen and take it in stride. Successfully intelligent people do not try to avoid the personal difficulties that they often must face, but they try to keep their professional and personal lives separate.

*Surmounting personal difficulties is described in **Heart Work** as one of 15 components included in Claus Møller's EI concept. It is referred to as **stress management**, which is the ability to withstand adverse events, stressful situations, and anxiety-provoking situations by actively and positively coping with stress. People who can manage stress well know how to deal with upsetting and unpleasant problems. They are able to pull themselves together after the knocks and defeats they meet in life. They control emotions rather than being controlled of them and they do not surrender to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. They can positively influence stressful events and they are able to actively do something to improve the immediate situation. They can often handle tasks that are anxiety-provoking or even involve an element of danger. The ability to manage stress is a critical factor in dealing with the rapid and constant changes in today's fast moving world. Studies have clearly indicated that stress management is one of the most important components of emotional intelligence for senior managers and corporate leaders. Difficulty in managing stress often leads to anxiety with symptoms such as irritability, tension, disturbed sleep, poor concentration and indecisiveness. The symptoms have an ill effect on one's overall capacity to function at home and at work.*

15. Successfully intelligent people focus to achieve their goals

Many people never seem to be able to concentrate on anything for very long. They are easily distractible, have short attention spans, and thus don't get much done. We do not always have total control of distractibility. For people who can concentrate, it is not a major problem. People who find it difficult to concentrate should do their best to arrange their working environment in order to minimise distractions. People should create an environment in which they can achieve their goals. Successfully intelligent people are aware of the circumstances under which they are functioning at their best. They create those circumstances and then use them to their maximum advantage.

Claus Møller's "Personal Organisation" concept includes methods to avoid interruptions and other time stealers. In order to work effectively and efficiently and reach our goals we need strategies to manage interruptions. A lot of people let themselves be interrupted in pursuing a goal – by others and by their own sudden impulses. Interruptions are a natural part of daily life. Some are necessary, inescapable or difficult to foresee. Others are unnecessary, foreseeable, and can be avoided. Some are desirable and natural because they represent important priorities for us. Some are undesirable and frustrating maybe because they are not representing important things for us or they disrupt one's work rhythm and prevent us from doing our job. You can't avoid all interruptions, but you can avoid some of them, learn to live with the rest and to lessen their negative effect on your ability to focus. You need to build them into your planning and have a strategy to deal with them. The way people deal with interruptions greatly affects the result they achieve. Successful organisations have strategies for managers and staff planning their time in such a way that they demonstrate respect for other people's time in mind. The work with Claus Møller's concept of "collective time planning" and organise the work environment so that people when needed can work concentrated without interruptions. People are allowed to put a "meeting with myself" sign on their doors or in their shared electronic diaries.

16. Successfully intelligent people spread themselves neither too thin nor too thick

People who spread themselves too thin often find they get nothing done, not because they don't work hard but because they make only small degrees of progress on large numbers of projects. People who undertake multiple projects should allocate their time so that there is a reasonable probability of finishing it. People who are unable to undertake more than one or at most two things at a given time are not necessarily at a disadvantage, as long as they do not fall behind. Undertaking too little at a time can result in missed opportunities and reduced levels of accomplishment. Successfully intelligent people avoid undertaking either more or less than they know they can handle at a single time. They allot their time to maximise their performance.

The "Time Manager" approach to life suggest how people can get a good overview of their goals, projects and tasks as well as of their time available during the next day, week, month, and year. It can inspire people to make goals that are both challenging and realistic and help them to spread themselves neither too thin nor too thick.

17. Successfully intelligent people can delay gratification

People who are unable to delay gratification seek reward for achieving short term goals but miss the larger rewards they could receive from accomplishing more important, long-term goals. Success is hardly ever achieved overnight. It requires one to delay gratification, sometimes for long periods of time. Successfully intelligent people do not deny themselves life's many small rewards and pleasures. However, they mainly devote their time and energy to those achievements – and personal relationships – that will bring them the greatest pleasure in the long run.

The ability to delay gratification is closely linked to one's ability to control impulses as described above (characteristic number 2). A study conducted on a group of four-year old children at Stanford University in the 1960s clearly demonstrated the importance and long-lasting effects of one's ability to control impulses and delay gratification from an early age. Impulse control was examined in these children by observing their ability to postpone receiving a treat and the consequences of this behaviour years later. The researcher gave the children the following instructions: "I'll give you a marshmallow, which you can eat now if you wish – but you can receive two marshmallows if you don't eat it when I'm out of the room and can wait until I return back in a few minutes." When the researcher returned twenty minutes later, he found that about a third of the children couldn't resist the temptation and had eaten the marshmallow, many within seconds after he left the room. The same children were tracked down fourteen years later after they had graduated from high school. The second part of this study revealed very dramatic differences between those who could and those who could not delay gratification fourteen years earlier. The children who could delay gratification as four-year olds were still more disciplined as adolescents and better able to postpone immediate pleasures for long-term goals. They were also more effective at most things they did in comparison with those who had problems controlling their impulses as young children. They were also more enterprising, readily took up challenges and pursued projects without giving up easily. Not only were they more reliable and responsible, but they were also more confident in general. The less impulsive group was more resistant to stressful situations and were better at handling disappointments as well. Lastly, this group received significantly higher marks on their college entrance examinations than the more impulsive group.

18. Successfully intelligent people see the forest and the trees

Many people are relatively unsuccessful in their careers because their inability to see the forest for the trees. Many people become so absorbed with the small details that they ignore or pay minimal attention to the larger picture in the projects they undertake. There are times and places where attention to details are very important. In designing computers or spacecrafts or cars, even the most minor slips may lead to major disasters. However, in many aspects of life it is necessary to concentrate on the big picture, or at least never lose the sight of it. It is very easy for us to become buried in the day-to-day details of life. Successfully intelligent people take time to ask themselves: Why am I doing this? What do I hope to achieve? They distinguish between the consequential and the inconsequential. They are aware of what they are doing and whether or not it will lead them to where they want to go.

People who have adopted the "Time Manager" approach are able to see the forest and the trees. They have in their personal planning tools a decision base for the use of their time. This base included their goals (for work and personal life) and a list of all their tasks and activities ordered in terms of key areas and with deadlines. "Time Manager People" do first things first. They know their priorities and what matters. They are not controlled by e-mails and mobile phones but by what they want to achieve. They have a good overview of all that needs to be done and this overview enables them to work with details here and now without losing the big picture. The overview also means that they have more energy and control of the situation – and they experience less stress, frustration and fatigue.

19. Successfully intelligent people have self-confidence

Everyone needs a certain amount of self-confidence to get through life. There can be so many blows to our self-esteem and so many setbacks, that without self-confidence, we may never achieve our goals. Lack of self-confidence can undermine our ability to get things done well because self-doubts become self-fulfilling prophecies. Self-confidence is often essential for success. After all, if people do not have confidence in themselves, how can they expect others to have confidence in them? It is, however, important not to have too much or misplaced self-confidence. Individuals with too much self-confidence do not know when to admit they are wrong or in need of self-improvement. As a result they rarely improve. Managers with low self-confidence have trouble obtaining respect and co-operation from their co-workers and employees. Those who are too confident can cause resentment and block the free exchange of ideas. It is important to strike just the right balance between too little and too much of a good thing. Successfully intelligent people believe that they are good and know that they can improve. They never become complacent or display arrogance.

*Self-confidence is strongly related to **self-esteem**. Claus Møller suggests in his books “Putting People First”, “My Life Tree”, and “Heart Work” how people can enhance their self-esteem and thus achieve more self-confidence. Self-esteem builds on the balance we perceive of our successes and failures in life and the number and kind of **strokes** we receive throughout our lives. Strokes are defined as “any type of attention and recognition that people give others and receive from others and from themselves”. If you do not receive enough strokes, you will feel bad, perform poorly, fail to succeed in life or run the risk the risk of becoming ill – both emotionally and physically. The strokes you get from others and give to them will determine the kind of relationship you have with them. Strokes can be positive or negative. **Positive strokes** are “any kind of attention recognising a person’s presence, performance, behaviour or attitude”. **Negative strokes** are “any kind of attention showing disapproval of a person’s presence, performance, behaviour or attitude”. The difference between the positive and negative strokes you receive determines your **stroke balance**, which, in turn, is essential to your self-esteem. Positive strokes will strengthen your self-esteem and self-confidence. Negative strokes and zero strokes will damage your self-esteem. Positive strokes have the same effect on people as water, sun and fertiliser have on plants and trees. The best thing a person can receive is positive strokes. The worst thing a person can get is not negative strokes but zero strokes (no attention at all). Nothing is more destructive for a person’s self-esteem and sense of well-being than zero strokes – being ignored or taken for granted. Lack of strokes has a dramatic impact on people’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour. When people don’t get enough positive strokes, they will try, consciously or subconsciously, to get negative strokes. This reaction is natural because, in spite of everything, negative strokes are better than no strokes at all. Søren Kirkegaard said: “The opposite of love is not hate – but indifference”. Conflicts, at home and at work, high personnel turnover, and high levels of absenteeism can often be traced directly back to lack of attention. Certain kinds of work are often taken for granted by other people, and at best receive attention that is negative (work such as luggage handling, cleaning, typing, filing, working on an assembly line). When the job is done satisfactorily, the person who has done it escapes criticism and is “rewarded” with zero strokes. If organisations want their people to perform at their best in their own interest and in that of the organisation, they have to actively avoid that anyone falls into the zero strokes category of employees. Companies that have adopted Claus Møller’s “**Putting People First**” approach create and maintain a positive strokes culture that promotes people’s feeling of being important as well as their self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation to perform at their best. The result is that everyone actively contributes to their own and their organisation’s success.*

20. Successfully intelligent people balance analytical, creative and practical intelligence

There are times in life when we need to be analytical. There are times when we need to be creative and times when we need to be practical. Successfully intelligent people learn what kind of thinking is expected from them in different situations and then bring to those situations the appropriate intellectual skills. They use a continuum of all three thinking skills in problem-solving and decision-making situations. Successfully intelligent people analyse the situation and come up with solutions or decisions that are both creative and have practical application.

In summation, hardly anyone possesses all 20 characteristics described above. But evidence proves that the more of these characteristics people adopt – the more they will be able to meet important life goals and thus become successful.

Organisations can achieve better results if they build a bridge between organisational success and the success of each individual. Organisational success is build on the success of every team in the organisation. Team success is build on the success of each team member. Organisations and teams can become more successful if they adopt the principles of and introduce their people to such concepts as “Successful Intelligence”, “Heart Work”, “Putting People First”, “A complaint is a gift”, “Employeeeship”, “Personal Quality”, and “Time Manager”.

Sources for this article:

Heart Work – improving personal and organisational effectiveness by developing and applying Emotional Intelligence (EI). Claus Møller and Reuven Bar-On

Employeeeship – mobilising everyone’s energy to win. Claus Møller

A complaint is a gift. Claus Møller and Janelle Barlow

Personal Quality - the basis of all other quality. Claus Møller

The Key to Personal Effectiveness – the time manager philosophy. Claus Møller

Successful Intelligence. Robert Sternberg

*As founder of one of the world's leading corporate training and soft consulting companies, **Claus Møller** has 30 years of experience in improving personal and organisational effectiveness. He has been a pioneer in the area of personal, team and organisational quality and service management. He has developed groundbreaking concepts in business like "Time Manager", "Putting People First", "The Human Side of Quality", "Employeeeeship" (what it takes to be a good employee), "Teamship" (what it takes to be a good team), and "Organisational Emotional Intelligence (OEI)". He has written more than ten books on these topics, and his ideas have been implemented by numerous well-known organisations around the world. He is one of the most important business gurus of our times. Based on his specific approach to training and consulting, his avid interest in emotional intelligence was natural and inevitable. Claus Møller has explored how best to describe, monitor and apply emotional intelligence and other kinds of intelligence (analytical, practical and creative intelligence) to improve effectiveness in the corporate setting and on the individual as well as on the organisational level.*