



TRACOM® GROUP
THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY®

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Imperative for — and Science of —
Achieving Social Intelligence.

The Imperative for Social Intelligence

*“The pace of change is **fueling demand for adaptable, critical thinkers, communicators, and leaders.** As technology accelerates, soft skills are in high demand to fuel people and business growth.”*

– LINKEDIN 2018 WORKPLACE LEARNING REPORT

While it's true that the world is constantly evolving, there are moments in history when massive transformations occur – the shift from hunter/gatherer communities to the agrarian age, the industrial revolution followed by the information age. We seem to be at the point of a new age that will herald the mass proliferation of artificial intelligence and automation. This rapid change in technology will have many effects on organizations and individuals, including the automation of many jobs.

A McKinsey study found that 30% of the most common activities in 60% of occupations could be automated by 2030¹, while other research claims that 210 million jobs across 32 countries are at risk of being automated.² While global organizations are on the front lines of creating, or at least adapting to this societal shift, our educational institutions and

organizations' learning and development programs are playing catch-up. To a large degree, technical skills are emphasized to the exclusion of soft skills. But as job requirements and priorities change, so too are organizations' beliefs about the skills needed for the future.

Many of the skills that have been valued in the past will become less relevant. While technical skills will always be valuable and necessary, many jobs requiring those skills will be largely automated, with people serving more of a support role rather than the “doers.” Many of the tasks done by professional occupations such as lawyers, accountants, data analysts and even journalists can be automated. So, where does that leave us? Back to basics, our humanity. The skills that are most human are the ones that will be most valued—Social Intelligence skills.

“What is clear is that interpersonal skills are unlikely to be rendered obsolete by technological innovation or economic disruptions.

In a changing workforce, it’s having a strong foundation in versatile, cross-functional skills that allows people to successfully pivot.

Learning the latest or hottest technology skills shouldn’t come at the expense of investing in the basic, core skills that people need to be successful in the workforce.”

– LinkedIn Global Human Capital Report 2018

New Demand for Soft Skills

A recent study by LinkedIn Learning surveyed 2,000 business leaders and found that the most sought-after job skills are things like leadership, communication, and collaboration.³ In fact, 57 percent of leaders said soft skills are more important than hard skills. In their 2018 Workplace Learning Report, LinkedIn found consensus across all groups that the top priority for developing talent is to invest in soft skills.⁴ Related to this, the number two priority was to ensure that training focuses on the skills needed for the future, rather than focusing too much on the present demands.

BusinessWeek has been tracking the performance of business executives and business education since the late 1980s. Their Skills Gap Analysis, which includes data from corporate hiring professionals, MBA alumni and students, and other inputs, identified several skills that employers say are “highly-sought” but hard to find. At the top of that list is “communication skills,” which is rated more important than analytical thinking, collaboration or strategic thinking.

Simply put, the organizations of the future will require people with flexible mindsets and interpersonal skills that enable them to deal with constant change and build meaningful relationships with others. Technical skills have a limited shelf life, but Social Intelligence skills cannot be automated or outsourced. They are fundamental job skills of the future and, once learned, they last forever.

Social Intelligence and Cognitive Biases

Social Intelligence skills accelerate our human capabilities and set us apart from artificial intelligence. But, similar to technical skills, they do not come naturally to most of us. In fact, we are hindered by *cognitive biases* that distort how we *Think, Act* and *React* to the world around us, and this affects our performance.

All people are affected by cognitive biases. Why? Because as our brains develop we look for quick interpretations of events and easy solutions to problems so we don't have to expend too much energy thinking about what we're doing. Thinking is hard work; our brains consume approximately 20% of the body's energy every day. These patterns of behavior and thinking become habits. This makes life easier and conserves energy, but the side effect is that we often make mistakes and poor decisions without realizing it. An example is easily experienced in our daily work commute—how much of it is done on auto-pilot?

You may drive for thirty minutes without *any* active thinking about what you're doing or where you are going, which is fine until you run your 3,000-pound vehicle into another 3,000-pound vehicle. This happens because our brains are using shortcuts and we aren't always paying attention to what's going on around us. Apply this same habitual autopilot to the workplace—people prefer checklists, processes and repetition of activity because it allows us to function with efficiency yet impacts our ability to be innovative.

Cognitive biases evolved for good reasons. They helped us to process information quickly, meet basic needs, and survive in hostile environments. However, in the modern world these biases come with costs. When we *should* be expending effort analyzing situations to make sure we're making sound decisions, our brains trick us into taking the convenient path.

To develop Social Intelligence, we need to break past these cognitive biases by changing our behavior and habits in four prominent areas: Communicating, Connecting, Adapting, and Innovating.

COMMUNICATING

When communicating and working with others, we are affected by the *Self-Evaluation Bias*. This bias influences how we see ourselves and how we interpret others' behavior. First, it causes us to see ourselves inaccurately, meaning we don't have very good self-awareness of how we come across to others. In other words, when we look in the mirror we may see someone younger and better-looking, and this generalizes to all sorts of other areas, such as our job performance, creative ability and skill at communicating. Second, this bias causes us to misinterpret the actions of others; when someone fails or does something we don't agree with, we attribute it to their personality or "character" rather than circumstances or simple behavioral style differences.⁵

At work, this combination of poor self-awareness and misunderstanding of others creates problems because people don't recognize one another's preferences for getting things done. We communicate and interact in ways that reflect our own needs without accounting for others' needs and preferences. Then, when our peers or colleagues don't respond in ways we expect, we hold it against them which leads to ongoing misunderstandings and deterioration of relationships.

Breaking this bias is as simple as learning about different behavioral styles and how people prefer to communicate and perform their work. With this knowledge, we can adapt how we communicate and work with others, and these simple changes lead to greater personal effectiveness. We can become aware of our own behaviors and how they are perceived by others. People then learn how to recognize how their behavior impedes their performance and effectiveness, particularly during stressful times of change. They also learn how to recognize the behavioral styles of others and how to communicate with them in ways that lead to understanding and acceptance. This helps teams and organizations to more effectively navigate through large-scale change.

CONNECTING

We spend a large percentage of our lives at work, and this means that the relationships we develop there are critical, not only to our personal and organizational effectiveness, but to our well-being. The importance of developing deep, meaningful relationships has been widely studied and is affected by our ability to empathize with others. Unfortunately, this is frequently undermined by the *Transparency Bias*, which causes us to believe that others accurately recognize *our* emotional state, and also to overestimate how accurately we understand *others'* emotional states. In other words, we think we're open books, when we aren't, and we believe that others are easy to read, when they're not. It's a cognitive and emotional double whammy.

This bias gets in the way when we want to develop meaningful relationships. We make assumptions about others, believing they understand what is going on in our minds and that they can detect our emotions. Essentially, we believe people think like us and therefore we treat them as if they are just like us, experiencing the same beliefs and emotions. Likewise, we think we recognize and understand others' emotions, but we're often wrong, misinterpreting others' signals. When a co-worker is upset about something, we often fail to recognize this and treat them as if nothing has happened, discounting their feelings and unintentionally damaging the relationship.

To break this bias, people can learn strategies to enhance Behavioral Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Simple behavior change, such as active listening and paying closer attention to people's body language and facial expressions can go a long way towards more accurate understanding of others. Conversely, developing better self-awareness is critical for overcoming the Transparency Bias. This can be achieved by listing your emotional triggers — things that cause you to feel stressed, frustrated or angry. This simple act has been shown to lead to greater emotional understanding and self-control during difficult times. Greater self-insight is also achieved by getting regular feedback on strengths and weaknesses. Hard as it often is to get feedback, it's critical for overcoming this bias and developing better relationships. Connecting better with others helps work performance and has been identified as one of the most critical skills for the future.

ADAPTING

As we move into the era of automation, profound change is going to happen, and change causes stress for people. Research has shown that people don't easily or quickly recover from setbacks,⁶ and as people's work lives are fundamentally changed by automation, we are going to experience large numbers of people whose lives are disrupted. Organizations need to be Agile, but they also need employees who are Resilient in the face of massive change. Resilience is the capacity to adapt to change, adversity and stress in a way that allows people to bounce back, but also to bounce forward – to grow and improve.

Our ability to recover and move forward during change is affected by the *Negativity Bias*, which causes us to focus on the “bad” more than the “good.” The Negativity Bias evolved to help us survive dangers in our environment — wild animals, poisonous food and severe weather were just some of the threats that needed to be avoided. In the modern world, the fight/flight/freeze response is more often triggered by perceived threats to our psychological safety, such as feeling powerless in the face of change. This bias affects our beliefs, attitudes and responses to change and holds us back from coping with difficulties and potentially, from being able to move forward in a way that leads to personal growth and opportunity.

The Negativity Bias is broken by a number of behavioral strategies that help people build different areas of Resilience, such as realistic optimism, problem solving and self-composure in the face of change, and social support to buffer against hard times. Fundamentally, people learn to recognize the automatic thoughts that all people have in reaction to stressful events. These automatic thoughts are almost always negative, perceiving events as threats. For example, when a change is announced at work, many people will invent a catastrophe for themselves, believing that the worst possible outcome is the most likely. This, in turn, affects their ability to be proactive and ensure that the change benefits them. Understanding this bias and adopting strategies to help build personal Resilience will help organizations successfully navigate large-scale change in the future.

INNOVATING

The importance of creating new concepts and ways of doing things has never been clearer. The modern era demands Agility from individuals and organizations. But our ability to be agile is affected by the *Tunnel Vision Bias*, which causes us to focus on narrow goals and priorities, missing other possibilities and opportunities. We're reluctant to consider alternatives to our line of thinking, or are so focused on what *we think* is the correct approach that we shut ourselves off to different ways of solving problems. The big outcome of this bias is that people, teams and organizations aren't truly open to new ways of doing things. Even when organizations espouse the need for innovation, this bias is still holding them back. This is why many organizations fail to keep pace or innovate, even when their survival is at stake.

Breaking this bias can be achieved through strategies to enhance experimentation and openness in how things are done. For example, idea-generation strategies that require people to think of unusual ideas that may, at first, seem awful. The bad ideas themselves won't work, however, bad ideas often contain the roots of good ideas, so this technique forces a subtle behavior change that overcomes the Tunnel Vision Bias. People become comfortable with experimentation, risk and ambiguity. This, in turn, helps teams by giving people the tools they need to be more inventive and influential, and more open to unique ideas and perspectives, to changing processes and procedures, to viewing markets and customers through different lenses. All of these things contribute to becoming an Agile Organization, one that can recognize and exploit unique opportunities. Agility is a fundamental ability that will distinguish successful organizations of the future.



The Socially Intelligent Organization

In successful organizations, so-called “soft skills” are more important than ever. However, training that supports developing people on these abilities will require an approach that implements understanding and behavioral tools. The best way to successfully develop these important skills is to educate people about cognitive biases, how these affect how we *Think, Act* and *React*, and how to break these biases through behavior change. This creates new habits which leads to more effective individuals, teams and organizations.

All organizations will be affected by future automation and will operate very differently than they do today. Those that are Socially Intelligent will set themselves apart by their ability to Communicate, Connect, Adapt and Innovate effectively.

Social Intelligence accelerates human performance by transforming the way we Think, Act and React in more positive and productive ways.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



CASEY MULQUEEN, Ph.D.

In his role as Senior Director of Learning and Development for TRACOM Group, Dr. Casey Mulqueen is responsible for leading the company in development of learning solutions based on the latest science within the field of organizational psychology. To this end, Dr. Mulqueen has worked with companies across the world to develop more effective teams, sales processes and large-scale change models. Additionally, he is a professional speaker for organizations such as Ernst & Young, PepsiCo, the Environmental Defense Fund, Reed Elsevier, and ExxonMobil.

Dr. Mulqueen earned his PhD at the Illinois Institute of Technology and has served as an adjunct faculty member in Colorado State University's Department of Psychology. He is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology, and the International Association of Applied Psychology.

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TRACOM[®] GROUP

THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANY[®]

The TRACOM Group – The Social Intelligence Company – is a workplace performance company and a leading provider of Social Intelligence solutions.

Through our learning solutions, TRACOM has helped millions of people around the world to uncover hidden barriers and identify strategies that enable more positive outcomes and professional success. Our Social Intelligence solutions include learning and development programs in the areas of Mindset, Resiliency, Agility, Emotional Intelligence and Behavioral Style – all focused on helping our customers create a more engaged, productive and effective environment. Through interpersonal skills training, team development programs, sales effectiveness training, survey and assessment design, and consulting in the areas of performance management, leadership development, or employee engagement, we deliver positive, impactful solutions for our customers. Backed by years of research and proven methodology, TRACOM Group provides the “Ah Ha’s” that lead to high-performance.

[WHY we do] We believe that improving peoples’ understanding of themselves and others makes the world a better place.

[WHAT we do] We synthesize our discoveries into actionable learning and resources that improve an individual’s performance in all parts of their lives. We call this Social Intelligence

[HOW we do it] Through research and experience we uncover the hidden barriers to individuals achieving their maximum potential and identify how to help overcome them.

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