Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

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When you hear the word intelligence, the concept of IQ testing may immediately come to mind. Intelligence is often defined as our intellectual potential; something we are born with, something that can be measured, and a capacity that is difficult to change. In recent years, however, other views of intelligence have emerged. One such conception is the theory of multiple intelligences proposed by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner.

Theory of Multiple Intelligences

This theory suggests that traditional psychometric views of intelligence are too limited. Gardner first outlined his theory in his 1983 book "Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences," where he suggested that all people have different kinds of "intelligences." Gardner proposed that there are eight intelligences, and has suggested the possible addition of a ninth known as "existentialist intelligence."

In order to capture the full range of abilities and talents that people possess, Gardner theorizes that people do not have just an intellectual capacity, but have many kinds of intelligence, including musical, interpersonal, spatial-visual, and linguistic intelligences.

While a person might be particularly strong in a specific area, such as musical intelligence, he or she most likely possesses a range of abilities. For example, an individual might be strong in verbal, musical, and naturalistic intelligence.

Criticism

Gardner's theory has come under criticism from both psychologists and educators. These critics argue that Gardner's definition of intelligence is too broad and that his eight different "intelligences" simply represent talents, personality traits, and abilities. Gardner's theory also suffers from a lack of supporting empirical research.

Despite this, the theory of multiple intelligences enjoys considerable popularity with educators. Many teachers utilize multiple intelligences in their teaching philosophies and work to integrate Gardner's theory into the classroom.

Learning more about the multiple intelligences can help you better understand your own strengths. Continue reading to learn more about the major characteristics of each type of intelligence, and if you still aren't sure which type describes you best, this quiz can help you figure it out.

Visual-Spatial Intelligence

Strengths: Visual and spatial judgment

People who are strong in visual-spatial intelligence are good at visualizing things. These individuals are often good with directions as well as maps, charts, videos, and pictures.

Characteristics

Characteristics of visual-spatial intelligence include:

- Enjoys reading and writing
- Good at putting puzzles together
- Good at interpreting pictures, graphs, and charts
- Enjoys drawing, painting, and the visual arts
- Recognizes patterns easily

Potential Career Choices

If you're strong in visual-spatial intelligence, good career choices for you are:

- Architect
- Artist
- Engineer

Linguistic-Verbal Intelligence

Strengths: Words, language, and writing

People who are strong in linguistic-verbal intelligence are able to use words well, both when writing and speaking. These individuals are typically very good at writing stories, memorizing information, and reading.

Characteristics

Characteristics of linguistic-verbal intelligence include:

- Good at remembering written and spoken information
- Enjoys reading and writing
- Good at debating or giving persuasive speeches
- Able to explain things well
- Often uses humor when telling stories

Potential Career Choices

If you're strong in linguistic-verbal intelligence, good career choices for you are:

- Writer/journalist
- Lawyer
- Teacher

Logical-Mathematical Intelligence

Strengths: Analyzing problems and mathematical operations

People who are strong in logical-mathematical intelligence are good at reasoning, recognizing patterns, and logically analyzing problems. These individuals tend to think conceptually about numbers, relationships, and patterns.

Characteristics

Characteristics of logical-mathematical intelligence include:

- Excellent problem-solving skills
- Enjoys thinking about abstract ideas
- Likes conducting scientific experiments
- Good at solving complex computations

Potential Career Choices

If you're strong in logical-mathematical intelligence, good career choices for you are:

- Scientist
- Mathematician
- Computer programmer
- Engineer
- Accountant

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

Strengths: Physical movement, motor control

Those who have high bodily-kinesthetic intelligence are said to be good at body movement, performing actions, and physical control. People who are strong in this area tend to have excellent hand-eye coordination and dexterity.

Characteristics

Characteristics of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence include:

- Good at dancing and sports
- Enjoys creating things with his or her hands
- Excellent physical coordination
- Tends to remember by doing, rather than hearing or seeing

Potential Career Choices

If you're strong in bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, good career choices for you are:

- Dancer
- Builder
- Sculptor
- Actor

Musical Intelligence

Strengths: Rhythm and music

People who have strong musical intelligence are good at thinking in patterns, rhythms, and sounds. They have a strong appreciation for music and are often good at musical composition and performance.

Characteristics

Characteristics of musical intelligence include:

- Enjoys singing and playing musical instruments
- Recognizes musical patterns and tones easily
- Good at remembering songs and melodies
- Rich understanding of musical structure, rhythm, and notes

Potential Career Choices

If you're strong in musical intelligence, good career choices for you are:

- Musician
- Composer
- Singer
- Music teacher

- Conductor

Interpersonal Intelligence

Strengths: Understanding and relating to other people

Those who have strong interpersonal intelligence are good at understanding and interacting with other people. These individuals are skilled at assessing the emotions, motivations, desires, and intentions of those around them.

Characteristics

Characteristics of interpersonal intelligence include:

- Good at communicating verbally
- Skilled at nonverbal communication
- Sees situations from different perspectives
- Creates positive relationships with others
- Good at resolving conflict in groups

Potential Career Choices

If you're strong in interpersonal intelligence, good career choices for you are:

- Psychologist
- Philosopher
- Counselor
- Salesperson
- Politician

Intrapersonal Intelligence

Strengths: Introspection and self-reflection

Individuals who are strong in intrapersonal intelligence are good at being aware of their own emotional states, feelings, and motivations. They tend to enjoy self-reflection and analysis, including daydreaming, exploring relationships with others, and assessing their personal strengths.

Characteristics

Characteristics of intrapersonal intelligence include:

- Good at analyzing his or her strengths and weaknesses
- Enjoys analyzing theories and ideas
- Excellent self-awareness
- Clearly understands the basis for his or her own motivations and feelings

Potential Career Choices

If you're strong in intrapersonal intelligence, good career choices for you are:

- Philosopher
- Writer
- Theorist
- Scientist

Naturalistic Intelligence

Strengths: Finding patterns and relationships to nature

Naturalistic is the most recent addition to Gardner's theory and has been met with more resistance than his original seven intelligences. According to Gardner, individuals who are high in this type of intelligence are more in tune with nature and are often interested in nurturing, exploring the environment, and learning about other species. These individuals are said to be highly aware of even subtle changes to their environments.

Characteristics

Characteristics of naturalistic intelligence include:

- Interested in subjects such as botany, biology, and zoology
- Good at categorizing and cataloging information easily
- May enjoy camping, gardening, hiking, and exploring the outdoors
- Doesn't enjoy learning unfamiliar topics that have no connection to nature

Potential Career Choices

If you're strong in naturalistic intelligence, good career choices for you are:

- Biologist
- Conservationist
- Gardener
- Farmer

Was this page helpful?

Article Sources

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