

POWER PLAY: COULD EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BATMAN AND JOKER?

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Abstract Emotional intelligence (EI) continues to survive even as psychologists seem to become modest to vital questions on the construct. One explanation to why EI is seen as important is perhaps because of the persuasive capacity it brings. Use of persuasion has two sides in literature: A positive aspect and a dark aspect. While one syncs with the 'getting things done' understanding of management, the other collides with it in the grey-shade of selfishness. Few articles recently raised the question if individuals with high EI are likely to manipulate, and if they are likely to be Machiavellian. In this paper, we elaborate the arguments in this arena and offer testable propositions for further study.

Keywords: Empathy, Manipulation, Responsibility, Machiavellianism, Metaphor

FOREGROUND

The Joker has taken hostage of a building. Batman tries to save them. During their fight, just when Joker would fall from atop the building and meet his death, Batman catches him. And Joker says:

Oh, you. You just couldn't let me go, could you? This is what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object. You are truly incorruptible, aren't you? Huh? You won't kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness. And I won't kill you because you're just too much fun. I think you and I are destined to do this forever¹.

Those lines from Joker to Batman are appreciated differently by different people. In that regard, it is not entirely unusual to come across a person who pours some admiration for the Joker. Skeptics to such argument could acknowledge possibilities like Stockholm syndrome (Graham *et al.*, 1988) and perhaps reflect on the explanation as to why hostages sympathize hostage-takers.

Life threatening situations are high on emotional content

¹ "The 13 Best Quotes by the Joker in The Dark Night – Heath ..." 2009. 11 Apr. 2014 <<http://www.buzzpirates.com/2009/06/the-13-best-quotes-by-the-joker-in-the-dark-night-heath-ledger-lives-on/>>

(Van den Berg & Ter, 2005). In a case such as the fight between Batman and Joker, the feelings of fear of loss of life and possible victory over an enemy are often aroused. But if it were so obvious and just limited to those superficial feelings perhaps Batman could have let Joker fall to meet his fate. Christopher Nolan, however, may be to excite viewers, chose to make Batman stop for a while as Joker says those few lines. And at least by the end of this part of the story, Batman stops himself from killing Joker; and to just remind, Batman resisted his potential urge to kill when he had a clear advantage over the Joker.

Could it be because Joker, through those few utterances, used his high EI to gain a deliberate control on what Batman chose to do? Could it also mean that Batman was low on EI and failed to figure out Joker's play? Or could it be possible that something apart from emotional intelligence controlled the situation and the outcome of it? If so, what was it?

In the next section, Juggler, we present historical ideas on the utility of EI at workplace, the relationship between emotions and persuasive capacities, the definitional issues in EI, and the role of motivation in regulating emotions, EI's relationship with Machiavellianism. In the last section, Background, we close the loop slightly altering the positions of these characters opening up the scope for readers to assess the power play.

JUGGLER

As an idea, emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1989) attracted great attention. It had the promise to help organisations find out, as one grows up in the hierarchy, what distinguishes a great performer from an average performer. Several works found associations for emotional intelligence with leadership (Suciu *et al.*, 2010) and career success (Poon, 2004) (also see, Carmeli & Josman, 2006; Druskat *et al.*, 2013; Lyons & Schneider, 2005). Recent meta-analysis of studies using emotional intelligence to predict job performance has also indicated that publication bias had negligible influence on the effects observed (O'Boyle *et al.*, 2011). But there was also a prior understanding that EI could better predict performance on jobs which needed high emotional labor; while for other jobs EI's predictive capacity is either low or with mixed results (Joseph & Newman, 2010). These studies do establish some critical links. One explanation to why these links exist is EI's contribution to interpersonal facilitation and the role of emotions in serving a communicative and social function (Brackett *et al.*, 2006; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Lopes *et al.*, 2006).

Studies built around dyadic relationships could show the significance of EI, and perhaps counter-intuitive findings too. For example, Brackett *et al.* (2005) demonstrated that, in couples where both partners had low EI scores, the amount of support to each other and relationship quality were also consistently reportedly low. However, the same study failed to find such consistency in couples where both partners were high on EI. Smith *et al.* (2008) went forward to find out if individuals in dyads use a specific pattern of communication to keep up the quality of relationship, and how they see each other on their EI. Couples with relationship satisfaction had reported similar EI scores and have not tended to avoid discussing relationship problems.

In a business sense, Mueller and Curhan (2006) elaborated the idea of negotiation (Thompson, 2005) and how EI could be an asset to the negotiators (Fulmer & Barry, 2004). For example, Bachman *et al.* (2000) identified that accountants with high EI have done better at recovering debts. Sevdalis *et al.* (2007) tested whether high EI individuals are likely to be more resilient to negotiation failure and reported positive findings. Treasure (2002), and Manna and Smith (2004) indicates that sales professionals agree on the need for EI and a capacity to negotiate to go together. Der Foo *et al.* (2004) brought out rather interesting relationship between one's objective gain in negotiations to their EI. It reports that individual's low on EI tended to have positive negotiating experience and have achieved higher objective gains; also indicating that individual's high on EI were more likely to create those objective gains. The authors insist cautious interpretation of results, since it is an apparent paradox that the individual creating the value in negotiation is not the

one consuming it. For an extreme case, to counter bullying and inappropriate behaviour at workplace, Sheehan (1999) recommends imparting emotional intelligence, perhaps through training or intervention, for improving self-restraint and compassion among individuals. One paper from Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS, 2008) goes on to explain how EI could be useful in different phases of negotiation. In discussing EI, such studies seem to subtly either bind-in the notion of altruism (for example, EI to create value in negotiations), or rid the idea of selfishness from (for example, EI as solution for bullying), or perhaps subscribe to the productive workplace outcomes ignoring how they are achieved (for example, EI for better debt recovery). They tend to create the aura that emotionally intelligent individuals do care for others in negotiation. EI suddenly fails to appear as a value-neutral (Gorton, 2010) concept. It indeed is likely to happen because communication is described as one of the emotional competencies required to possess EI, and since people with EI are also expected to be empathetic (Boyatzis *et al.*, 2000), it floats around as an inseparable rhetoric for so long as the root representation of EI remains unquestioned.

Revisit the more popular definition on EI, from Salovey and Mayer (1997),

“...psychologists have recognized an influential three-part division of mind into cognition (or thought), affect (including emotion) and motivation (or conation)... Definitions of emotional intelligence should in some way connect emotions with intelligence if the meanings of the two terms are to be preserved. Recall that motivation is the third sphere of personality. It refers to biological urges or learned goal-seeking behaviour. *To the extent that it is involved in emotional intelligence, it [motivation] should be thought of as secondary....* EI involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions *to promote emotional and intellectual growth.*”

The two phrases marked in italics seem to evoke disconcerting reactions, perhaps rightly, from one community of social scientists. In the shade of an enlightened understanding of emotions and their capacity to alter rationality (for example, Coricelli *et al.*, 2010), this definition of EI appears to have prematurely assumed that use of emotional knowledge would always be made to further cooperation (for example, empathetic response) and not competition (for example, self-serving instinct). That perhaps hoodwinks the organisations to believe EI as a power (for example, to negotiate) that automatically comes with an elevated sense of responsibility. If we reconnect to our foreground on that criterion, Batman already exhibits his EI!

Some scholars would argue that EI containing the idea of empathy (Elliott et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2001) is not totally problematic; and that perhaps it is the duty of the social scientist to guide the individuals and society. But if one comes across a Martian to converse, and if by chance (or by the virtue of one's EI) one knows that the Martian is high on EI, there could be a reason to feel concerned. And that reason stems from the possibility of the Martian misusing his emotional knowledge to manipulate the one in case (or at least so perceived by the one). Such feelings may be reciprocal provoking suspicion instead of trust; and such cases are not trivial. The seed level idea that the Martian could exploit comes from a machiavellian capacity that coexists with EI. Not just that, but the one has to now deal with the curse of knowledge. Consider Baker *et al.*'s (2013) study which indicates that high EI were correlated to overconfidence in estimating the sincerity in please and an enhanced self-reported gullibility. In the same study, high EI translated to negative performance in lie detection tests. In this regard, Broda-Bahm (2012) aptly described that higher emotional intelligence leads to higher susceptibility to deception. On our foreground, this evidence makes Batman high on EI and perhaps susceptible to Joker's ploys.

Following such concerns, recent studies have questioned the very premise that EI contains empathy. One of the earlier studies (Glaso *et al.*, 2006) which showed EI's instrumentality comes from a workplace setting, and deals with leader-subordinate interactions. The study reported that individuals explained the motive for emotion regulation profoundly in terms of reaching their specific goals. In communicative contexts, Kilduff *et al.* (2010) indicated that high EI could lead to deliberate disguise and misattribution for personal gain. Ford *et al.* (2011) present evidence for instrumental use of EI, and Cote *et al.* (2011) indicate the possibility of misuse of EI. At the core of these findings, which contradict the pro-EI findings, is the diminishing empathy. And that, to some extent, explains the coexistence of EI with machiavellian tendencies (Dries & Roland, 2007; Ickes, 1997).

Allow us to bring Machiavellianism into perspective here. Kessler *et al.* (2010) define it as the belief in the use of manipulation, as necessary, to achieve one's desired ends in the context of the work environment. They indicate that machiavellians "...are not necessarily heartless, nasty or vindictive, but they can be genuinely accommodating when it is in their best interest to do so". In another study, Dries and Roland (2007) attempted to distinguish high potential individuals from regular managers, and discovered a sense of social responsibility to be the distinguishing factor with managers reporting better scores. The scholars explained machiavellianism among high potential individuals as a possibility leading to lower scores on responsibility. In their understanding, machiavellianism refers to an approach where "the ends justify the means". It could be learnt from

Griffith's (2003) paper that machiavellian intelligence has evolutionary significance and includes a process of assessing payoff for self; and that needs emotional knowledge, a component that is integral to EI. At this stage, it must be intuitive that to be machiavellian is to be emotionally intelligent literally by its definition except use it for personal gain, not cooperation. In his paper, Gigerenzer (1997) remarks that similar, if not same, observations on primate intelligence have led to hypothesizing both machiavellian and social intelligence. From that support, if not in the argument here, at least during conception, machiavellian intelligence and emotional intelligence seem to have begun as partners on diverging routes.

At crossroads now, when these sister ideas meet, they appear eerily similar but subtly different. The question that one should ask therefore is not as much as whether someone has high EI or not, but it is whether one's empathy-worn EI is strong to overcome the temptation to be machiavellian. Our Joker perhaps does not resist this venomous temptation. May be, that is why he thinks that sense-of-righteousness is misplaced in Batman! But by now, the Joker clearly demonstrated his high EI, only empathy-ridden; let us call him finally as machiavellian.

Now, we shall try to persuade on this view to the questions raised in the foreground, first. Keeping aside the impossibility that Nolan could have considered designing his characters around EI; and going by the situation, its high emotional content, and the response of the characters, there is perhaps reason to believe that both Batman and Joker were high on EI. However, more meaningful distinction between them comes from their motivation behind employing EI. Ironically, motivation as a factor was considered secondary in conceptualizing EI.

In interactional settings, considering motivation and knowledge of consequences as critical factors that facilitate individuals to either battle their rationality to stick to their EI or follow the slippery slope of machiavellian approach, we offer our first set of testable propositions in a tautological model.

Proposition 1a: In interactional settings, motivation can predict the use of EI. This relationship is moderated by the knowledge of consequences for each other.

Proposition 1b: The type of interactional strategy an individual involves in could predict the use of EI. This relationship is moderated by the motivation to interact.

IMPLICATIONS

Businesses should ask why these propositions are important to study, and how the difference in EI or machiavellian tendencies as long as they can get the job done. To build

Table 1: Types of Interactions

Interactant A	Interactant B	Type of Interaction	Explanation
EI	Machiavellian	(Indeterminate)	Motivation; Knowledge of consequences
EI	EI	Cooperation	Empathy offers common ground
Machiavellian	Machiavellian	Bargaining	Gain-seeking offers common ground

an answer to those questions, let us revisit Alan Gregg's interview (2012) of Goleman.

Gregg: How do you make someone more empathetic?

Goleman: First of all, they have to want to be more empathetic. You just can't make someone be empathetic. That is one of the big fallacies of these [training] programs where they [corporate] send everyone through...[To be empathetic] you want to make sure that what you are trying to help people improve on fits with where they want to go in life. It has to fit their values; what they want for their job, their career, or their life generally. If so, if you get a match, then you can tell the next step, which is to help that person get an honest self-assessment: do you really need help and empathy?...In sales, empathy is crucial. If you can't take the customers' perspective, you may make a hard pressure sale, but they will never come back. You have to build rapport, and that takes empathy. And then you match what you have with what they want. That builds a relationship and brings the customer back...

Salesmen who push for hard pressure sales could only be short-sighted, in that they control the consequence in the near term to show elevated performance. But those results may not be repeatable, at least not with the same set of customers; which is what brings us to the differentiator called empathy. Salesmen successful in the long-run may be driven not just by the emotional knowledge of a possible short-term gain but also by the possible multiplicity of success if they acknowledged the capacity of customers to detect the salesmen's empathy or lack of it towards them. In other words, in an interactional setting, one needs to acknowledge that the other interactant is an equal player. Extending this explanation, it could be argued that organisations should not just be concerned about performance; rather they should be concerned about its repeatability-which is when a deeper understanding of the use of emotional intelligence calls for attention. And we hope our propositions could add a little there. To conclude, we submit that the objective of the argument presented in this paper is not to downplay the importance of EI, rather it is to color the background for further research with an iota of skepticism.

BACKGROUND

Lastly, to close the loop, let us revisit the power play between Batman and Joker. This time Batman gets hold of the Joker in an interrogation cell and asks him questions. Part of the conversation is here:

Batman: ...why do you want to kill me?

Joker: I don't want to kill you! What would I do without you? Go back to ripping off mob dealers? No. No.No! You...you... complete me.

Batman: You're garbage who kills for money.

Joker: Don't talk like one of them. You're not! Even if you'd like to be. To them, you're just a freak, like me!

By submitting that he does not want to kill Batman, did Joker find place for self-righteousness within himself? Or after clearly establishing his dominance over the Joker, was Batman exhibiting information-seeking behaviour, and to that extent perhaps machiavellian tendency? Or have they come to an unstated understanding that they are eerily similar but subtly different?

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