WHEN ‘SMART’
Broadening the Definition of Intelligence
IF YOU ARE READING THIS, THERE ARE TWO ASSUMPTIONS THAT CAN BE MADE ABOUT YOU: AS A GRADUATE OF ONE OF THE WORLD’S LEADING UNIVERSITIES, YOU ARE HIGHLY INTELLIGENT, AND YOUR HIGH IQ HAS UNDOUBTEDLY HAD AN IMPACT ON YOUR CAREER PATH, AT LEAST IN THE BEGINNING. WHILE ABSTRACT INTELLIGENCE IS CRITICAL, WHAT CAN DETERMINE THE LONG-TERM ARC OF YOUR CAREER IS YOUR “SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE.” YOUR CAPABILITIES WITH PEOPLE— WHETHER READING A CLIENT’S KEY CONCERNS, Harnessing the diverse talents of a team or inspiring a demoralized division—can have a greater influence on your ascent to the highest ranks of leadership than your abstract intelligence alone.

That is the concept behind the Program on Social Intelligence (PSI), a new initiative at the School headed by Michael Morris, the Chavkin-Chang Professor of Leadership.
The program, which draws upon emerging research in psychology to help students through the combination of assessment, experiential learning and coaching, is being integrated throughout the MBA experience, from new-student orientation to alumni reunions.

PSI emerged out of a strategic-planning process in which faculty members spent a year interviewing alumni, recruiters and other business leaders. In developing the program, they looked to the internal training programs in firms admired for their management development, such as Cisco, GE, Lehman Brothers and UBS. This contact with industry is ongoing, as firms have stepped forward to sponsor activities and partner in the development of programs.

While the program to teach social intelligence is new, the theory behind it was introduced decades ago—on the Columbia campus. In 1920, psychology professor Edward Thorndike proposed that social intelligence, “the ability to understand and manage men and women,” involves different mental faculties than the abstract intelligence measured by IQ tests, a controversial position in the dawning age of standardized tests (see “Roots at Morningside Heights, page 16).

PSI is designed to help students realize their talents and draw out the talents, energy and best intentions of the people they touch, whether subordinates, partners, clients or even counterparts in a negotiation.

While the distinctiveness of social intelligence, and how to measure it, was debated in psychology for decades, contemporary research techniques, including fMRI measures of brain processing, have increasingly corroborated Thorndike’s claims. In studies at Columbia and elsewhere, researchers have found that our social faculties draw on different parts of the brain, follow different rules and are learned in different ways than our faculties of abstract reasoning.

Last fall, psychologist Daniel Goleman, who in his latest book, Social Intelligence, offers a popular summary of this recent research and spells out its implications for leadership and other important relationships, came to Columbia as part of PSI’s guest speaker series. Goleman explained how the capabilities needed in contemporary organizations are better captured by the framework of social intelligence than emotional intelligence, about which he had written previously. He also noted that Columbia’s PSI is the world’s first academic program dedicated to social intelligence. In response to a question, he maintained that social intelligence can be learned only through instructive experiences, not through lectures or books (including his own!).

Learning from experience—facing a problem, taking action, getting feedback, setting improvement goals and trying again—is central to the pedagogical method of PSI. In addition to weaving experiential exercises into two core management classes—Creating Effective Organizations and Leadership—PSI uses the extracurricular aspects of the MBA Program as laboratories for teaching leadership. For instance, although teamwork techniques are taught in the context of a class, they are taught more richly through activities that provide practice, feedback and resources to the MBA study groups—a prolonged, realistic and consequential teamwork experience.

PSI is structured into four streams that occur at different points in the MBA Program (see “Four Streams,” page 15). Two begin during first-year orientation. “Navigating Careers” uses the job search to teach self-awareness, impression management and networking. “Leading Teams” focuses on the study group experience to teach teamwork, managing peers and collaboration skills.

One popular orientation event brings in improv theater performers, who lead each study group through acting exercises that teach the techniques they use to develop ideas quickly and collaboratively on stage. “These are very applicable to certain phases in teamwork, such as brainstorming, as well as to such other managerial challenges as consensus building and crisis management,” says Morris. “After learning to use these techniques for collaborative improvisation, students then work with a professor to analyze a case about
a firm that has integrated these techniques into its culture. We have a real advantage in teaching the social side of management because our cosmopolitan New York location gives us access to rich talent in journalism, theater, psychology and many other relevant professions.”

The other two streams are optional and come later in the year. One consists of workshops for groups of students led by faculty members and New York–based thought leaders outside academia. Last fall, the program featured workshops on harnessing collective intelligence by Jim Surowiecki, “The Financial Page” columnist for the New Yorker, and on leadership development by Steve Kerr, chief learning officer at Goldman Sachs. The final stream consists of programs for second-year students who are advancing their leadership skills by serving as peer advisors or club officers.

Next fall, a program that centers on the somewhat different experiences and needs of EMBA students will be launched. There will be more emphasis on developing a broad professional network, which is important to the value proposition of the EMBA Programs.

Also in the works are programs that continue beyond commencement. PSI plans to reach out to alumni through workshops at reunions and “lifelong-learning” executive education programs keyed toward important career transitions. “We also want to fill the gap with events for younger alumni who have been out 5 or 10 years, are moving into more leadership-oriented roles and are seeking to expand their skill set as well as their professional networks,” says Morris.

Further, the proximity of the School’s many New York–area alumni offers the potential for networking events that could benefit both alumni and current students. Finally, a resource center is planned to enable alumni to benefit from the faculty’s work in identifying reliable assessment tools and assembling a roster of School-certified executive coaches.

“Social intelligence captures much of what leading means to students in today’s business environment,” says Morris. “PSI is designed to help them realize their talents and draw out the talents, energy and best intentions of the people they touch, whether subordinates, partners, clients or even counterparts in a negotiation. Some students will draw on these capabilities when serving as CEOs or politicians; others will use them when interacting with others while leading their teams, deals, careers or simply their lives.”

Morris adds that the program’s agenda will continue to evolve. As businesses and organizations change, Columbia Business School will be at the forefront in helping its students—and graduates—navigate those changes.

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**Four Streams: Extracurricular Activities in PSI**

- **NAVIGATING CAREERS:** “This stream of activities focuses on the career search,” says Morris. Some are delivered by faculty members during orientation, and others through the School’s Career Services office, which offers coaching and workshops to first-year students before the interview season. To help students focus their learning goals for the summer internship, external executive coaches review 360 degree feedback with them in one-on-one meetings.

- **LEADING TEAMS:** This set of activities focuses on the study group experience. Starting during orientation and continuing through the fall term, students are given assessment feedback to raise their self-awareness and coaching from peer advisors about their team’s dynamics. “We give them feedback not only at the level of their teaming habits but also at the level of the study group,” says Morris. “Often a group, no matter how smart its members, has a weakness in that it lacks a necessary ingredient of teamwork, such as a devil’s advocate to expose flaws in a plan or a consensus builder to bring people together on a decision. With more awareness of what a team needs at each phase of a project and what habits and strengths each member brings to the table, a team can fill its gaps by adding members or asking members to take on roles that they don’t spontaneously gravitate toward.”

- **MANAGING ORGANIZATIONS:** These optional activities, open to the entire Columbia community, take place in the middle of the fall term. They consist of a guest speaker series and small-group workshops led by faculty members (sometimes jointly with executives or consultants) on topics related to leading organizations: decision making, navigating corporate politics, persuasive speaking and managing diversity, among others.

- **ADVANCED LEADERSHIP:** These activities are for second-term and second-year students who elect to take on a leadership role, such as serving as a peer advisor or a club officer. The Student Life office organizes training workshops run by faculty members and external leadership consultants. “Second-year students who have been trained by consultants in the art of executive coaching act as peer advisors,” says Morris. “They guide their group through orientation exercises and provide feedback in follow-up meetings. This is invaluable training for anyone who aspires to lead in firms that use team-based structures.”
Roots at Morningside Heights

It’s not surprising that Columbia is leading the social intelligence revival, as Morningside Heights is where the concept was born. In 1920, at a time when IQ tests were first being widely used in schools, industry and the military, Teachers College psychologist Edward Thorndike argued that social intelligence, a key to “acting wisely in human relationships,” is distinct from the abstract reasoning ability tapped by IQ tests—and an equally important driver of success.

“Social intelligence shows itself abundantly in the nursery, on the playground, in barracks and factories and salesrooms, but it eludes the formal standardized conditions of the testing laboratory,” Thorndike wrote in a 1920s issue of Harper’s Monthly Magazine. He emphasized the role of social intelligence in success in many occupations, particularly those involving management: “The best mechanic in the factory may fail as a foreman for lack of social intelligence.” Perhaps not coincidentally, these ideas emerged shortly after the founding of Columbia Business School in 1916, which brought the issues of management into the campus discourse.

Since Thorndike’s initial explorations, Columbia has carried on its charge of being an institution where social science research meets real-world problems. The University’s location in New York, rather than the idyllic countryside or a quiet provincial city, keeps researchers at the forefront of the real world. New York’s profile as a center for relationship-based industries, like private equity, investment banking and consulting, make Columbia a natural place for research on the dynamics of social judgment and interaction in business.

The plans for a new leadership curriculum at Columbia Business School based on social intelligence resonated strongly with Arnold L. Chavkin ’77 and Laura Y. Chang ’77, who are spouses as well as classmates. “I think that anybody in business long enough understands that leadership is about interacting with various constituencies, convincing people to do things and building coalitions within organizations,” Arnie says. “It’s about working with CEOs and managers to implement solutions—analysis and numbers alone are not enough.” To support the fledgling PSI, the couple generously endowed the Chavkin-Chang Professor of Leadership chair, now occupied by Michael Morris, the program’s architect.

Morris says that besides the world-renowned psychologists in Columbia Business School’s Management Division, the School’s ability to draw upon the University’s other resources lets PSI explore such areas as neuroscience, social network analysis and decision making. For example, the program draws on Teachers College’s strong programs in organizational psychology and executive coaching. These ties to the scientific disciplines have enabled Columbia to develop a more contemporary approach than other top business schools.

“At some top business schools, the management department is made up of scholars who write case studies and management books but are not active researchers in scientific disciplines, and this of course is not without its advantages,” Morris says. “Yet Columbia has taken a different route of building a management department of researchers actively working in disciplines like psychology and sociology. Our advantage lies in innovation—when there are new insights in these fields, we get them first and can be the first to apply them to management and share them with our students.”