



IQ BOOST

Reckon you're an undiscovered genius or labouring under the illusion that you copped the silly gene? The word 'intelligence' has sidelined all sorts of smarts with equal or more value than standard IQ measures. It's time to gauge your grey matter.

Words: Harriet Edmund

Intelligence is mired in semantic inferences of stability. You're either MENSAs material – or you're not. Yet according to the *Macquarie Dictionary*, intelligence better approximates adaptability.

According to Melbourne psychologist and neurologist Ben Buchanan, being truly intelligent is about responding to your environment to achieve your goals.

"In this world of social relationships, what's the point in having a high IQ if you can't get what you want from life because you have poor social skills?" he says.

In other words, someone who scores highly on traditional measures of intelligence and aptitude can fail to learn from mistakes and, as such, fail to achieve their goals.

There are more hypotheses about intelligence



She's a brainiac

Forget smart drugs. Upgrading your mental chops could be as simple as adjusting your schedule to honour your brain's best times. Studies suggest that for most people, concentration peaks around 10 am, making morning the optimal window for more focused brain work. Conversely, the afternoon, after a slight temperature dip that can invite fatigue, is generally more conducive to creative brainstorming and phone calls. If you need to schedule a meeting or presentation, leverage optimal verbal skills, which peak around midday.

bored or frustrated in the role," says Buchanan, from Victorian Counselling and Psychological Services.

The IQ illusion

There is a point to having a concrete measure of smartness, even if its meaning has practical limitations – not least to level unrealistic assessments made by our own noggins about how clever we are. The effect of thinking one is smarter than the average citizen was documented by Dunning and Kruger in their renowned Dunning-Kruger Effect, otherwise known as illusory superiority. Surely you've heard the observation, 'But most people aren't very smart' (and in the same breath, that everyone else is a bad driver).

Statistically, of course, it's impossible for most of us to be above average. The sobering fact is that your IQ score falls somewhere between 85 and 115 – along with two thirds of the population. The point? Not much. More important may be how well you align your strengths with the way you spend your nine-to-five. If you're terrible with numbers but great with words, an accounting role is likely to portray you as less competent and less clever than copywriting, for instance.

The IQ test actually recognises that discrepancies between levels of acumen can obscure results. IQ assessments that show vast discrepancies between high skill in one area and low in another are disregarded.

"More insight can be gained from looking at the patterns of strengths and weaknesses across the multiple intelligences," says Buchanan.

The term 'genius' is similarly fraught, experts say, lumping it in with words such as 'good' and 'nice' – meaningless without a context and enlivened by value judgments. Far be it from us to dispute your brilliance, but contrary to stereotype, there is no basis for terms such as 'tortured genius' or links between high creativity and off-the-charts brain brilliance. (D'oh.) Buchanan says that genius is defined by the societal values du jour and that people are deemed to fit the framework or not based on how highly society values their brand of output. Claude Monet was ridiculed for his controversial work yet is now considered an artistic genius. Van Gogh sold a single painting during his life yet now is the undisputed king of prodigious paintwork. Professor Nick Haslam, of the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences,

than you can poke an abacus at.

According to Howard Gardner, who coined multiple intelligence theory in the 1980s, there are eight types of intelligence: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic. The triarchic theory coined by Robert Sternberg measures componential, experimental and practical categories, accounting for the contention that intelligence is how well you deal with environmental changes throughout your life. The trend in contemporary cleverness

appraisals puts emotional and social intelligence on par with – if not above – academic achievement.

In his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, psychologist and science journalist Daniel Goleman says that the culturally sanctioned definition of human intelligence is far too narrow. Emotions, he says, play a major role in thought, decision-making and individual success.

Organisations are also recognising a broader purview to optimise hiring decisions. "Agencies purposefully seek people of average intelligence so the person won't get



says a genius is “a mixture of very high intelligence, high creativity, good luck and a lot of hard work”.

Gifted kid syndrome

Were you a gifted kid? Great. Now forget it. Stephanie Kakris, of High Performance Coach, says being put on a brain pedestal in your formative years doesn't shore up success in the adult world. Focusing on how clever your teachers said you were can be an encumbrance to real world success.”

“The two strongest qualities a person can possess are determination and persistence,” she says. “The ability to continue to work towards your goals in the face of setbacks is critical to success.”

Realising your weaknesses and being open to addressing them won't necessarily boost your IQ score, but it can help you get what you want out of life. “It's the best way to avoid the mistakes you've been making over and over again, while being blissfully unaware of them,” adds Buchanan.

So perhaps personality is a far better predictor of happiness than your IQ score.

In fact, the personality characteristics of conscientiousness – paying attention to other people's needs – the inclination to plan ahead and being open to new experiences are considered more valuable in life than having a high IQ, concludes Buchanan.

Left, right, maybe

Another one to put in the rubbish beliefs collection is that your brain takes sides. While the standard thinking says that your brain's left hemisphere is all about logic and reason and the right is about intuition and emotion, no one's brain is so clearly defined in its functioning.

“Intelligent thinking and behaviour requires the coordination of the whole brain. However, there are some parts of the brain that are specialised for some of the skills involved in aspects of emotional intelligence, such as recognising emotions expressed in the face and inferring other people's mental state,” says Prof Haslam, “while creativity requires an associative style of brain functioning rather than a purely linear or logical mindset.”

Verbal processing usually uses the left side of the brain, so intelligence tests that rely on vocabulary, verbal reasoning and comprehension will largely assess your left hemisphere function. Of the MRIs Buchanan has studied, he says the more educated his patients are, the bigger the disparity between the right and left side of their brains.



Contemporary thinking says success depends on recognising and leveraging your strengths while relegating areas in which your weaknesses rein to lower roles (like leisure..whether you're good at badminton doesn't really matter). These tips might just give you the mental edge.

Rest

Nothing will drain your brain faster than sleep deprivation. “Being well rested means you will use your cognitive skills more efficiently, because tiredness, anxiety and stress interfere with mental clarity, focus and concentrated effort,” says Prof Haslam.

GIVE IT A CRACK »» Sleeping even seven hours a night will slowly add up

to a costly sleep debt when it comes to brain function according to recent University of Pennsylvania and the Walter Reed Research Institute studies. Getting six hours a night for two weeks resulted in participants having the “cognitive equivalent of being legally drunk”. Best aim for eight hours or more every night!

Play

The jury is still out on whether cerebral exercises have any long-term effect on mental performance. "The main problem is that although people can train themselves to do better on particular tasks, the performance improvement rarely generalises to other tasks and abilities," says Prof Haslam. But a 2008 study, called Improving Fluid Intelligence with Training on Working Memory, was the first research to show it might be possible to increase your intelligence to a significant degree through training.

GIVE IT A CRACK >>

Neuroscientists have designed a series of games called Lumosity to help challenge certain parts of your brain. The online and smartphone resource lets you exercise core cognitive abilities whenever and wherever you like.

Work Out

Physical exercise – the type that really gets your heart pumping – has been proven to have long- and short-term benefits on your brain. New research from Boston University School of Medicine shows that physical activity is beneficial for brain health and cognition. The findings published in *Behavioural Brain Research* suggest certain hormones, which are increased during exercise, may help improve memory and processing speed.

GIVE IT A CRACK >> Get at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity into most, if not all, days of the week. You can break it into short bouts such as three 10-minute sessions each day.



Mingle

Whether you have that twinkle in your eye that some say gleams from exceptionally smart folk or you prefer sticking to the conversation basics, networking is the perfect way to boost your know-how and social intelligence. "A big part of success in life is the ability to build strong interpersonal relationships – be they in a netball team, a family unit or at work," says Kakris.

GIVE IT A CRACK >> Mixing with new people, ideas and environments opens you to new opportunities for growth. Ideally, networking is done through face-to-face interactions, but Andrea Kuszewski, a behaviour therapist from Florida, told a 2010 Harvard University intelligence seminar that social media can also be used to maximise your cognitive potential.

Meditate

Meditation improves memory, increases brain size, makes both brain hemispheres work together and enhances your emotional intelligence according to the Exploration of Consciousness Research Institute. Plus, a 2012 study published in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* found that participating in an eight-week meditation training program had measurable effects on how the brain functions even when you are not actively meditating.

GIVE IT A CRACK >> There are various meditation practices, but the Australian Teachers of Meditation Association says it's broadly a discipline that involves turning the mind and attention inward and focusing on a single thought, image, object or feeling. A quiet space makes meditation easier and you don't need to take up any particular posture, just be comfortable so that you don't need to readjust part way through the practice. Kakris, who teaches meditation, recommends starting with a guided meditation using an app such as Relax and Rest, which gives five-, 13- or 20-minute options with music or nature sounds. ■

