

Multiple Potentials – a background

Our careers work is based on the idea that the human potential is multifaceted. An interesting theory about the human potential that has emerged in the recent past is the Theory of Multiple Intelligences propounded by Howard Gardner. On the basis of his research Gardner presents in his book *Frames of Mind* (1983) the postulation that the human potential has numerous facets and that it is multidimensional. Gardner in his later work has gone on to expand on his initial theory. The reader is encouraged to read Gardner's works in the original in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of this theory.

These theories provide valuable clues and offer frameworks within career counselling could occur. Given the unique demands posed by career counselling situations, our programmes for guidance and counselling do not rely exclusively on any one of these theories. We have instead adapted these ideas and added findings from our own research to take a multiple potentials framework within which career counselling services could be delivered. Our framework delineates five potential areas which are described in Appendix 6. We provide a short overview below.

The Linguistic Potential

This is a potential area that is linked to the skill of using language effectively and attractively. A person with a high linguistic ability would have a keen sensitivity to the nuances and meanings of words as well as the sounds of words. They demonstrate the ability to express thoughts and ideas in a pleasing manner. The linguistic ability could be manifested in the written and / or spoken form.

The Analytical-Logical Potential

The ability to reason, analyse information, extract meaning from data, are all examples of the analytical-logical potential. People with high levels of this potential would understand cause-effect relationships and be able to apply logic to make links between observations and find solutions to problems.

The Spatial Potential

This is the ability to deal with two and three dimensional space. People with this potential are those who are able to transform abstract ideas into visual or concrete forms. They exhibit the ability to visualise, design and express themselves through the manipulations of shapes, colours and forms.

The Personal Potential

This is the potential that allows a person to be sensitive to emotions and behaviour. People with a high personal potential are first of all attuned to their own thoughts and feelings. This sensitivity is further manifested in their ability to understand others. They exhibit an ability to understand the dynamics of behaviour, get in touch with other people's moods, establish rapport and evoke trust.

The Physical-Mechanical Potential

This is a potential area that reflects control over and sensitivity to one's physical self. Strength, stamina, muscular flexibility, co-ordination, quick reaction times – are all reflections of the physical-mechanical potential. Further, this is an area that is linked to mechanical skills. These are people who are efficient with tools and understand how machines and mechanical systems work.

It is important to note that these potentials characterise all human beings. All of us for example demonstrate the ability to use words and speak a language. All human beings have the ability to apply logic and spatial skills. The personal, physical and mechanical skills similarly characterise the behaviour of all human beings. The point to be noted is that some of these potentials develop to higher levels than other potentials within the profile of a given individual. It is this *profile* that a career counselling programme is interested in. Sensitive observations and suitable testing techniques that are skilfully used, enable us to explore an individual's potential profile. The 'highs' and 'lows' that emerge in a potential profile, provide a framework within which career counselling can progress.

The vital point that the career counsellor must note is that not all these dimensions of human abilities are stimulated in the regular classroom. In fact, certain abilities are not given as much importance as other potential areas. Typically, a strong emphasis continues to be placed on the linguistic and logical potentials, while capabilities in the areas of personal and design skills are often neglected. Career counselling that takes a multiple potentials approach, allows the unveiling of latent talents that could then be linked to the world of work.

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