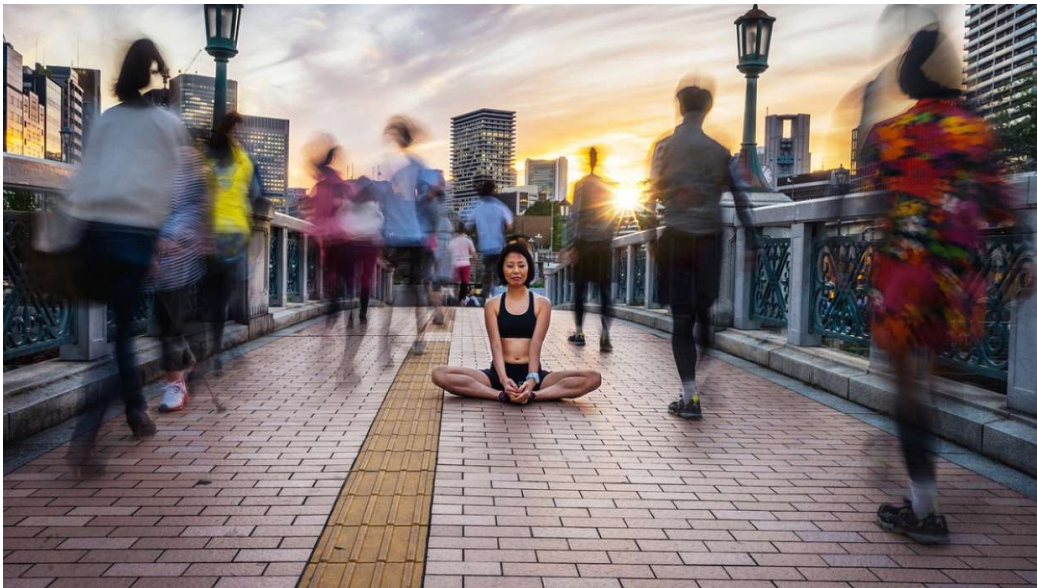


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We know about IQ and EQ, but what about PQ?



A species evolves by developing new ways of understanding and responding to its environment. Over the last 20 years or so, the office-dwelling species has taken an evolutionary leap by recognising EQ alongside IQ. Prior to this, corporate employees were largely recruited, assessed and valued on the basis of their intellect...

Then Daniel Goleman offered a framework to analyse and develop emotional intelligence. There were at first those in the business world who scoffed at the idea of valuing soft skills. Nowadays, even the most left-brained institution acknowledges the value of self-awareness and people skills.

But what is next for the evolution of the office-dwelling species?

We propose a new dimension of human intelligence for the 21st century: physical intelligence (PQ).

In the days of cave-dwelling, physical prowess was a matter of life and death. Obtaining food, evading predators and building shelter were all dependent on physical faculties such as the sense of smell, sense of direction, hand-eye co-ordination and muscular strength.

For most office workers today, the body has no role to play in finding food, safety and shelter - except perhaps the fingers when typing in credit card details and clicking “buy”. In working life too, the body has been gradually losing relevance. Potters, thatchers and blacksmiths, for instance, needed a highly developed sense of sight, touch and rhythm.

These professions, and so many others, have been replaced or disembodied by automation. In communication too, the body used to play a central role; leaders and orators used their bodies to captivate audiences through physical presence and expression. But, since the advent of audio-visual technology, our powers of corporeal expression have dwindled.

Little by little, the need for physical intelligence is being eroded by technology and specialisation.

The vast office-dwelling population has to wait until after working hours to engage the body in a meaningful way. We do use the body at work, of course. It transports us from meeting to meeting. But its role is not valued, nor is physical intelligence assessed or trained as part of professional development.

But must it be that way? Could we not conceive a more noble role for the human body, even in this age of ever-increasing automation? Below are three ideas out of many for how physical intelligence could be promoted in office life, and how this would benefit our wellbeing.

Wellbeing and the Body

Engaging the body during the working day improves health and vitality and enhances mental performance. Many companies offer gym membership on that basis but a workout at the gym is not the only way to re-energise using the body, nor is it everyone's cup of tea.

Employees could be encouraged to find their own creative and humanising ways to revitalise during the working day. Some might even choose activities which serve a practical purpose, such as tending the office plants, sweeping leaves or cooking lunch for the team.

There could be all sorts of unexpected benefits – such as more engaged and satisfied staff – alongside the primary benefits of enhanced wellbeing and mental performance.

Communication and the Body

It is hard to deny that the body plays a role in communication. But the skills of corporeal expression are vastly under-developed, relative to verbal skills.

When preparing to give a presentation, for instance, what percentage of time is spent working on physical expression, as opposed to time spent developing the verbal message?

And don't forget, it is not only during presentations that the body is communicating: we express ourselves physically the whole time, whether we are aware of it or not, and whether we like it or not.

How might we set about improving our powers of physical communication?

As with any skill, the first step is to increase awareness. We can train ourselves to pay more attention to the physical expression of others. What is the speed and rhythm of their movements? What kind of gestures do they use? How do they position themselves in space relative to others? Just by paying greater attention to people's body language, we can derive benefits.

When you pay attention to someone's body language, they will sense it, consciously or not. This in itself can create better rapport.

Moreover, with the information you gain by paying attention, you can get to know someone better. Just as learning something new about a client's personal life can help you to

understand them better, learning something new about their physical self-expression is a way of building rapport. You can also verbalise your observations to let them know they have your attention. In conflict conversations, this can be particularly effective. You might for instance say: "I noticed that you winced just now. Was there something I said that upset you?"

As well as learning to observe others, we can learn to become more aware of our own physical expression.

Did I have my back turned to someone throughout a meeting? Was I unconsciously tapping my foot during a conversation? Have I been walking about with my shoulders hunched up all morning? Am I breathing more rapidly because I feel stressed? And we can learn to regulate our behaviour, and make more conscious, intelligent choices about how to stand, walk, breathe and move in response to the people around us.

If I notice, for instance, that a colleague is gesticulating and moving very fast, I could decide to speed up my own movements to match theirs. Or I may decide to slow my movements down in order to influence theirs. Or, if I am in conflict with someone, can we both regulate our breathing and heart rate to have a more productive conversation to resolve our issues? These choices are only possible if I know how to pay attention and to regulate my own physical expression.

Creativity and the Body

As well as boosting energy and improving communication skills, the body is also a source of creativity that can help us solve problems and work better. At the simplest level, we can trigger new ideas just by engaging the body, like Archimedes' eureka moment when he climbed into the bath.

We can also consciously involve the body in problem-solving to tap into new kinds of intelligence. For instance, by expressing a problem as a physical metaphor and enacting it through the body, we can open up new solutions and ways of thinking. Another well-established approach to understanding problems and relationships is the constellation methodology, which can unlock new perspectives and insights through the wisdom of the body.

The body is an untapped source of energy, connectedness and creativity. With enough imagination and courage, we can use it to bring new vitality and creativity to our human resources. More importantly, by acknowledging PQ alongside IQ and EQ, we can help to ensure a more healthy and humane future for the office-dwelling race.