

## **Social Intelligence: A Needed Friend of School Administrators**

**Dr. David E. Bartz, Professor Emeritus**

Department of Educational Leadership  
Eastern Illinois University  
Charleston, IL

**Dr. Lindsey Hall, Superintendent**

Mahomet-Seymour CUSD #3  
Mahomet, IL

**Mrs. Sheila Greenwood, Superintendent**

Bement CUSD #5  
Bement, IL

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### **Abstract**

Social intelligence skills are an excellent means for school administrators to establish positive relationships with individuals within their sphere of influence. These positive relationships can lead to others supporting the goals for which a school administrator is accountable and work toward their achievement. Ultimately, students are the benefactors of the use of social intelligence skills by school administrators through enhanced educational environments that improve student learning. *Social awareness* (what school administrators sense about others) and *social facility* (what they do behaviorally based on awareness) are the two holistic areas of social intelligence with skills such as: empathy, attunement, organizational awareness, influence, personal connection, development of others, organizing groups, teamwork, inspiration, social analysis, situational awareness, social expressiveness, presence, negotiating solutions, authenticity, clarity, social sensitivity, knowledge of social roles, rules, and scripts, and social control flowing from them.

*Keywords:* social intelligence, school administrators, building relationships, effectiveness

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### **Introduction**

There is little doubt that “people skills”—ability to communicate effectively, to manage social interactions and social relationships—are critical for today’s successful leaders (Riggio & Reichard, 2018, p. 8).

School administrators can prosper by effective application of social intelligence skills because this will enhance their efforts to build rapport and establish positive relationships with

others in their sphere of influence. Conceptually, social intelligence aligns with the *positive psychology* movement through its emphasis on creating authentic, meaningful, and positive relations with others (Seligman, 2018). Positive psychology focuses on attributes of psychology that create enjoyment and well-being in people.

Seligman (2002) indicates that “social intelligence is the ability to notice differences among others, especially with respect to their moods, temperament, motivation, and intentions—and then act upon these distinctions” (pp. 143-144). Seligman notes that social intelligence holistically represents “good human relationships” (p. 183). Albrecht (2006) describes social intelligence as:

a combination of a basic understanding of people—kind of strategic social awareness—and a set of component skills for interacting successfully with them. A simple description of social intelligence is the ability to get along well with others and get them to cooperate with you. (p. XIII)

Social intelligence is also linked to the concept of *psychological capital*—hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy—because school administrators practicing it strive to: (1) achieve specific goals, (2) have positive expectations to achieve these goals, (3) remain steadfast in the pursuit of the goals, and (4) believe they can be successful in effectively utilizing psychological capital (Datu, King, & Valdez, 2018).

Positive relationships with stakeholders and others with whom a school administrator interacts play a huge role in successfully achieving the goals needed to effectively serve students and maximize their learning for which the school administrator is ultimately accountable. Hill and Jochim (2018) observe that when school administrators want to accomplish important goals, they “must work through others, on whose enthusiasm and skill the results will depend” (p. 1). In this vein, Goleman (1997) states: “Those who are adept in social intelligence can connect with people quite smoothly, be astute in reading their reactions and feelings, lead and organize, and handle the disputes that are bound to flare up at any human activity” (pp. 118-119).

### **Development of Social Intelligence**

The term social intelligence was initially coined by Thorndike (1920) in the context of the importance of leaders possessing effective human relations skills. In the 1920’s Mayo led a movement that stressed leaders utilizing effective human relations skills to maximize the productivity of staff based on the *Hawthorne Effect*. The famous 1924 Western Electric Hawthorne Study in the Chicago area demonstrated that employees’ productivity is increased dramatically as a function of management paying attention to their needs and showing interest and consideration of them (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2013). This is the origin of the concept known as the “Hawthorne Effect”—people work harder and are more productive when management shows personal interest and consideration for them.

Social intelligence gained considerable attention through the efforts of Gardner (1993) and Goleman (2006). In his classic book *Multiple Intelligence*, Gardner lists interpersonal intelligence (social intelligence) as one of seven types of intelligence and describes it as the ability to understand other people and work cooperatively with them. Goleman (2006) brought social intelligence to the forefront through various writings, including his book *Social*

*Intelligence*, in which he purports the benefits of leaders effectively utilizing social intelligence to improve relationships between people. He stresses the importance of nourishing relations to enhance human connections to counter “social corrosion”—the disconnections among people and conditions detrimental to positive relationships (Goleman, 2006, p. 6).

### **Major Concepts and Specific Skills of Social Intelligence**

Gardner (1993) explains social intelligence as one broad concept that he termed *interpersonal intelligence*, which is the capacity to notice distinction among others’ moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions as well as the desires of others (p. 23). Lievens and Chan (2010) break down social intelligence into two factors: (1) cognitive (also called crystalized) which is the *knowledge to understand* how to decode verbal and non-verbal behaviors of others; and (2) behavioral (also called fluid) as *taking actions* on the cognitive knowledge in a given situation. Goleman (2006, p. 84) has a similar holistic conceptualization and lumps the ingredients of social intelligence into the two broad categories of *social awareness* (what we sense about others) and *social facility* (what we do behaviorally with knowledge of this social awareness).

The following basic skills pertain to social intelligence for school administrators effectively utilizing social intelligence based on the aforementioned overarching concepts: (1) empathy; (2) attunement; (3) organizational awareness; (4) influence; (5) personal connection; (6) development of others; (7) organizing groups; (8) teamwork; (9) inspiration; (10) social analysis; (11) situational awareness; (12) social expressiveness; (13) presence; (14) negotiating solutions; (15) authenticity; (16) clarity; (17) social sensitivity; (18) knowledge of social roles, rules, and scripts; and (19) social control.

- *Empathy* means being sensitive to the needs of others, demonstrating an effort to understand their particular situations, building connections between self and others and identifying what motivates them. The focus is on establishing rapport.
- *Attunement* means listening carefully to determine how others feel and connecting with their moods. This also includes positive communication through non-verbal behaviors.
- *Organizational awareness* means understanding the social networks in the work environment; being cognizant of their apparent intended purpose, meaning, and unspoken norms; and appreciating the culture and values of the organization and work unit.
- *Influence* is getting support from others by appealing to their interests, thereby persuading them to be engaged in discussions and openly expose their thoughts. This is especially important to develop in the individuals who are well respected by their peers.
- *Personal connection* is recognizing and responding properly to people’s feelings and concerns in order to establish *connectedness* that results in positive relationships.
- *Developing others* means demonstrating interest and providing meaningful feedback that is helpful to them. This involves the commitment of personal time and energy in compassionate coaching, mentoring, and assisting others.

- *Organizing groups* is initiating and coordinating the efforts of a network of people (e.g., groups, task forces, committees, and social media linkage).
- *Teamwork* involves providing psychological support for members and creating a cooperative spirit in which everyone participates for the common good of the team. This includes providing support and demonstrating a personal interest in each team member.
- *Inspiration* is communicating a compelling vision, building pride, establishing a positive emotional tone, and motivating individuals to “be their best.”
- *Social analysis* is being able to identify and have insights pertaining to people’s feelings, motives, and concerns that can be used to develop rapport and intimacy with others to build positive relationships.
- *Situational awareness* means utilizing skills in observing and understanding the context of a situation and the ways it dominates or shapes the behaviors of people, including “hidden agendas.”
- *Social expressiveness* is engaging others meaningfully through social interaction and the proper context of the setting.
- *Presence* is the overall impression or *total message* sent to others by one’s behavior. (Presence involves the inferences that others make about your character, competency, and general sense of you based on behaviors they observe.)
- *Negotiating solutions* is preventing conflicts, or resolving those that exist, and effectively mediating differences among people.
- *Authenticity* is the extent to which others perceive you as acting from honest and ethical motives, and the extent to which others sense that your behaviors are congruent with your personal values and that you are *playing it straight*.
- *Clarity* is the skill of expressing your ideas clearly, effectively, and with impact. It includes paraphrasing, semantic flexibility, skillful use of language, effective use of metaphors and figures of speech, and concise explanations.
- *Social sensitivity* is reading the meaning and context of a social situation, understanding the expectations of how to behave in a given social situation (social norms), and knowing what others are feeling and thinking.
- *Knowledge of social roles, rules, and scripts* means understanding the informal rules that govern social interaction in a setting. It is *knowing how to play the game* of social interaction and being viewed as socially sophisticated.
- *Social control* is behaving tastefully within an expected role and being tactful. It means making an impactful self-presentation by knowing “what to do,” as well as exuding confidence and self- efficacy. (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2013; Riggio, 2014, Goleman, 2006; Riggio & Reichard, 2018)

Table 1 lists characteristics used by school administrators with high social intelligence through in-person, telephone, electronic, and traditional written communications.

Table 1

*Characteristics of School Administrators with High Social Intelligence*

Characteristics used by school administrators with high social intelligence through in-person, telephone, electronic, and traditional written communications are:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Do not try to elicit a strong emotional response from others.</li><li>2. Do not speak in absolutes about people, politics, or ideas.</li><li>3. Speak with precision and choose words carefully.</li><li>4. Avoid making others feel ignorant.</li><li>5. Do not post anything online that would be embarrassing to show family members.</li><li>6. Do not overgeneralize (do not use “you always” or “you never”).</li><li>7. Listen to—and entertain—perspectives other than their own.</li><li>8. Do not waste time arguing.</li><li>9. Listen to understand, rather than merely reply.</li><li>10. Do not judge people by the opinions of others or confuse their opinions with facts about others.</li><li>11. Do not avoid or take dissenting opinions and criticism personally.</li><li>12. Accept apologies, and apologize when they are wrong</li><li>13. Holistically comprehend the context of the interaction and message</li><li>14. Be excellent at observing and “people watching.” (Wiest, 2016; Nollan, 2017; Goleman, 2013; Sampson, 2015)</li></ol>

## Skill Areas that Compliment Social Intelligence

### Mindfulness<sup>1</sup>

Mindfulness means that school administrators consciously focus on being aware of what others are likely thinking and feeling in a given situation, as well as analyzing their thoughts before speaking or taking action. Sometimes school administrators are on *auto pilot* and not thinking much about others and all the factors that give context to a situation. Mindfulness is effectively performing *in-the-moment* by processing what others say, including their likely motives, and focusing on what the school administrator wants to accomplish in a situation. Technology distractors such as texting, tweeting, and emailing are counterproductive to effective mindfulness when done in the presence of those with whom the school administrator is conversing. Mindfulness skills are a near perfective fit with social intelligence.

### Mindset<sup>2</sup>

Dweck's (2016) approach to *mindset* is based on the premise that school administrators can choose to believe that factors such as social intelligence and personality are unchangeable (fixed mindset) or that these factors can be nurtured and developed (growth mindset) for professional and personal enhancement. This represents the proverbial *nature vs. nurture* debate that has been discussed for centuries. School administrators are impacted by both, but believing that nurturing can improve oneself—growth mindset—will enhance their expertise in social intelligence skills and application.

School administrators challenging themselves to develop existing attributes and being willing to put forth the effort is key to the growth mindset and increasing social intelligence skills. Purposefully engaging in professional development is essential to maximizing potential and enhancing achievements. It is important for school administrators to avoid stereotyping themselves in ways that deter motivation to improve social intelligence skills. For example, if a school administrator believes she/he has never been—or cannot ever be—a “people person,” there is likely little motivation to improve. Willpower is essential to overcoming setbacks and pursuing needed change for improved performance of social intelligence skills.

Dweck (2016) cautions that some school administrators can inadvertently fall into the *false growth mindset* regarding social intelligence development by identifying the attributes they like about themselves regarding social intelligence and referring to them collectively as a growth mindset. Dweck reminds us that, simply put, the growth mindset is about believing we can develop and expand our abilities (p. 214-215).

The Arbinger Institute's (2016) *Outward Mindset: Seeing Beyond Ourselves* describes mindset as being *inward* or *outward*. According to the Arbinger Institute, mindset is how a school administrator views oneself, staff, and others. With the inward mindset, school administrators are generally self-centered and often pay little attention to the needs and wants of staff and others pertaining to what should be changed and improved to accomplish goals and, thus, desired results (Bartz, 2017a). Leaders with an outward mindset see staff and others as similar to themselves—whose efforts and work matter to everyone and are paramount to attaining goals.

With the outward mindset, the approach to establish and meet job goals—and tasks related to them—is viewed as a collaborative effort that considers the creative and innovative

ideas of all others involved and causes an environment in which others eagerly share ideas. Table 2 provides specific comparisons of the inward and outward mindsets for school administrators in the context of working with staff and others. The outward mindset greatly enhances the effective application of social intelligence for school administrators.

Table 2

*Comparing Inward and Outward Mindsets for School Administrators toward Staff and Others*

<b>Inward Mindset</b>	<b>Outward Mindset</b>
1. Strives to control people	1. Strives to cause staff and others to be fully responsible and engaged in work
2. Often blames others when things go wrong	2. Takes responsibility for actions of oneself and others in the work related environment
3. Is narcissistic	3. Displays modesty toward others
4. Consistently defends one’s position	4. Works collaboratively with others to solicit their opinions and collectively develop the best solutions for problems and achieving goals
5. Has interactions with others that focus on protecting oneself	5. Has interactions with others that focus on building positive relationships with and among people
6. Uses behaviors that try to manipulate others in an attempt to improve one’s own image	6. Strives to facilitate “committed behaviors” collectively with others to achieve goals for serving students
7. Shows minimal regard for how to create “collective results”	7. Is motivated about how to work with others collaboratively, both among themselves and with oneself
8. Views others in context to how they can help oneself achieve goals	8. Focuses on the needs and challenges of others to create an environment that prompts individual and team cooperation

<b>Inward Mindset</b>	<b>Outward Mindset</b>
<p>9. Assumes that to simply change one’s behavior is the best way to enhance the work productivity of others</p>	<p>9. Understands that changing how oneself views others is equally beneficial to everyone in comparison to merely focusing on changing behaviors toward others</p>
<p>10. Focuses on how to make oneself “look good,” even at the expense of others</p>	<p>10. Sees, thinks, and works on how to improve job performance through collaboration with others that incorporates their needs and wants, and gains recognition for them</p>
<p>11. Often creates competition between staff and causes them to work independently of each other</p>	<p>11. Focuses on groups, teams, or committees as entities that have a collective belief of working with each other for the common good</p>
<p>12. Focuses mainly on the job responsibilities of oneself</p>	<p>12. Assists others in identifying their interests and being motivated to successfully achieve what they need for the betterment of their work and the organization</p>
<p>13. Focuses on getting the work “out the door” with little concern for its benefits</p>	<p>13. Focuses on the meaning and purposefulness of the work and the positive impact it can have on others and the organization</p>
<p>14. Is inclined to step in, take over, and direct the work of staff and others when not pleased</p>	<p>14. Helps others understand what they need to do; provides staff development when needed; and furnishes the necessary resources to accomplish goals</p>
<p>15. Creates conflict that keeps people embattled with each other (divide and conquer for control)</p>	<p>15. Focuses on preventing and resolving conflict among others</p>

Inward Mindset	Outward Mindset
16. Focuses on personal and professional goals and behaviors to protect and advance oneself	16. Focuses on the goals of others and the organization, and objectives and behaviors that take others into consideration
17. Advances one’s own agenda at the expense of others	17. Focuses on working together with others for collective results to benefit the organization and accomplish the necessary goals
18. Identifies what can be taken from others to achieve objectives for oneself	18. Identifies what can be given to help others successfully achieve their work
19. Oftentimes tries to control the behavior of others for self-benefit through power, authority, and fear	19. Relinquishes power and authority to empower others’ abilities to be responsible and accountable for their work and goals (Bartz, Thompson, & Rice, 2017)

### Communication Skills<sup>3</sup>

At the heart of school administrators effectively applying social intelligence knowledge and skills is effective communication. Attending, reflecting, exploring, self-disclosure, acceptance, and supporting are essential communication skills needed by school administrators for effectively applying social intelligence in face-to-face communications (Bartz, 2017b).

1. **Attending:** The school administrator expresses interest in what others are saying and feeling by:
  - **Physical attending:** The school administrator’s general posture, facing the other person, maintaining eye contact, sitting in a relaxed rather than a tense position, and having a pleasant facial expression.
  - **Mental attending:** The school administrator paying close attention to the other person’s verbal and nonverbal behaviors and relating what is being communicated to what has previously been discussed. (This is *in-the-moment* mindfulness.)
2. **Reflecting:** The school administrator displays a sincere desire to understand the other person’s situation and feelings by reviewing what is expressed, clarifying it, and periodically summarizing to make sure that the meaning and intent have been correctly understood by each person. The school administrator also asks questions to promote discovery and insights for both parties.
3. **Exploring:** The school administrator examines and probes what the other person states to identify specific concerns or problems while being careful not to interrupt the flow of the conversation. If an incomplete explanation or contradictory

- information is given, the school administrator asks questions to obtain more information and prompt the other person to provide an *in-depth* explanation.
4. **Self-disclosure:** The school administrator shares thoughts and information with the other person related to the specifics of the situation being discussed based on the school administrator's background experiences. This provides a supportive and constructive relationship concerning what the other person has communicated.
  5. **Acceptance:** The school administrator shows appreciation and respect for the other person as a fellow human, is not defensive if questioned, and makes sure the other person's dignity is maintained.
  6. **Supporting:** The school administrator draws out and identifies positive actions the other person has taken that focus on enhancing the person's self-esteem and confidence.

A school administrator needs to be adept and sensitive when utilizing each of these six communication skills to use them effectively in concert with social intelligence skills. It is not necessary to use all of these skills in one particular conversational setting. As an example, self-disclosure might not be used in a conversation if the school administrator believes that sharing personal background information would distract from the heart of the issues identified and being discussed and have a negative impact on establishing—or maintaining—a positive relationship.

School administrators need to choose their words carefully for internal and external written communication (e.g., letters, memos, tweets, texts, and emails). Email communications can especially lead to misinterpretation of the intent and tone of the matter being addressed. School administrators need to be sure that they do not inadvertently create situations that negatively impact their ability to influence others by reacting too quickly in a negative manner. Being positive and building rapport are crucial. When communicating via social media, school administrators are cautioned to avoid “letting down their guard” by stating something they may later regret.

Use of traditional media (e.g., radio, television, newspapers, and other print media) is often enhanced by advanced press releases. Interviews with print media can be especially tricky because a leader may say something in the spur of the moment that quickly becomes regrettable, as noted in this example:

“In what seemed like an instant, H. Fred Walker lost a hold on his college [Edinboro University] presidency” (Stripling, 2018, p. 24A). Mr. Walker “made a series of intemperate remarks that insulted both groups [faculty and students]” that created “a public drama that had gripped the campus for several days” resulting in his resignation (p. 24A). Walker went from being prominently featured in a Chronicle of Higher Education article one week to having his forced resignation reported in the next weekly issue of the journal because of his offensively perceived remarks.

### Concluding Thoughts

School administrators always need to be looking for techniques to build positive relationships with others that will aid them in achieving the goals for which they are accountable. While school administrators have utilized social intelligence skills throughout their careers, the

information presented here should, as Covey (1989) states, help them *sharpen their saws*. So much of a school administrator's effectiveness is based on gaining the support and commitment of others to help them achieve goals crucial to maximize student learning and provide each child with an equitable education. Effective application of social intelligence skills will significantly aid in meeting these desired results.

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**Footnote**

- <sup>1</sup>Bartz, D. E. (2017a, September). Applying positive psychology to school administrators. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 4(8), 1-11.
- <sup>2</sup>Bartz, D. E., & Karnes, C. (2018, March). Leaders accomplishing results. *International Journal of Education and Human Developments*, 4(2), 1-8.
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