

The Multiple Potentials Framework.

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Understanding the human potential has been an area of psychological research for more than a century. 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. This description of the human potential provides a useful framework within which to help a young person understand and identify personal interests and aptitudes. Gardner in his later work has gone on to expand on his initial theory. Our experience in using the theory has indicated that 5 of the potentials described by Gardner are most relevant for guidance and counselling. Presented below is a brief description of the 5 potential areas described by Gardner that we have adapted to suit the Indian situation and use as a framework within which to provide careers education.

The Linguistic Potential



This potential area reflects the fluency of language. It is the ability to manipulate words and expressions. A person with a high linguistic ability is sensitive to the meaning of words, and to the skill of using words effectively to communicate. Linguistic ability may be manifested in the spoken form. The public speaker who is able to hold an audience at rapt attention or the counsellor who is able to accurately reflect the client's sentiments and emotions are examples of the linguistic ability at the spoken level. The linguistic potential may also manifest itself in the written form. Powerful essays that changed the history of nations, poetry that captures the sound of raindrops, or the

presentation of a news item in the daily newspaper are examples of the linguistic potential in the written form.

The Analytical-Logical Potential



The person's ability to think logically, analyse, understand cause-effect relationships and solve problems is reflected by the analytical-logical potential. The ability to understand the underlying dynamics of a problem, the links between components and identify solutions are related to the human ability to analyse and apply logic. Similarly the ability to extract information from a mass

of data, make sense of this information, identify trends and patterns and make predictions, all rest on the analytical-logical potential. An important point to be noted is that this potential is often associated with science and mathematics. This is an erroneous linkage. A large range of human endeavour requires logical ability. The archaeologist who is able to tell us about the dressing habits of a civilisation based on her extrapolations from a comb discovered on site uses logical skills as much as another person involved in abstract mathematics.

The Spatial Potential

This is the potential that describes the ability to perceive, visualise and transform observations into concrete realities. It is the sensitivity to space and the ability to manipulate space at the two dimensional level or at the three dimensional level. Activities linked to design draw heavily from the spatial potential. The architect who can ‘place’ a building on a vacant plot of land in his mind’s eye or the sculptor who ‘releases’ an image from a block of stone use their spatial talents and abilities. The sensitivity to colour is another manifestation of the spatial potential. The interior designer who transforms the ambience of a drab room by merely changing the colour of the curtains uses her spatial ability. Creativity is a concept that is often confused with the spatial potential. Creativity is a fundamental human quality that is required by almost all aptitudes and potentials. We are often confronted by non-creative artists and designers, who can only copy the works of others. Alternatively a creative writer or a creative logician brings originality to their respective aptitudes. It is important that creativity is understood as a core human trait and not as an aptitude. The spatial potential reflects the fluency in dealing with space.



The Personal Potential



The knowledge of self and the sensitivity to others reflect the personal potential. People exhibiting this potential would have a high degree of control and awareness over their own feelings and values. A person with a high personal potential is sensitive to the moods and emotions of others. These are people who can understand others and are attuned to the forces that influence and mould human behaviour. A common misunderstanding is that people who are ‘extraverted’ have high personal skills. The ability to make others laugh or be the soul of a party reflects the personal intelligence as much as the capacity to quietly understand others, their moods, thoughts and behaviour. Most importantly, the person with a high personal potential would be able to logically arrive at the reasons behind a unit of behaviour and would be able to influence and mould human behaviour.

The Physical-Mechanical Potential

Some of us are especially fluent in the use of our bodies. The physical-mechanical potential is linked to the mastery over the motions and expression of the body. It is the fluency of movement. The dancer who is able to 'show' us the agony of a tree being felled, the actor who transforms a corner of the stage into the heaving deck of a ship simply by the way he moves his body both use their bodies to communicate feelings, moods, emotions and messages.



Careers that require stamina and strength also require the physical-mechanical potential. Sports persons, protection service specialists would require the physical-mechanical potential. This potential is also linked to the person's mechanical ability. These are people who demonstrate an innate sensitivity to the laws of mechanics and are good at the use of tools. Typically engineers, technicians and others involved with machines and equipment demonstrate a well developed physical mechanical ability.

It is important to note that these potential 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. Observations and suitable testing techniques enable us to identify areas in which an individual demonstrates a higher potential. These 'highs' and 'lows' provide a framework within which career counselling can progress.