Information, development and social intelligence

In the introduction to this book, the editor, Blaise Cronin, correctly indicates that social intelligence has become a prominent idea 'whose time has come', and which is already operationalized in a number of disciplines, such as ethology, primatology and psychology. The problem, however, remains that it is a chameleon concept for which there is no single accepted definition.

The aim of this book is, therefore, according to Cronin, not only to explore the concept *social intelligence*, but also to treat it not as a field or a discipline, but as a lens that allows one to 'adjust the resolution of certain literatures and perceive significance and make connections previously undetected' (p.5).

Although acknowledging the fact that it is a multi-dimensional concept without a single standard definition, the opening chapter by Cronin (p.19) defines social intelligence as '... a process whereby a society, organisation or individual acquires information in the widest sense, processes and evaluates it, stores and uses it for action ... strip mining social habitats for clues and cues'. The key dimensions that are deduced from this definition are the following: it is action orientated; it is closely related to self-knowledge; it is applicable to all levels of life; and it plays a vital role in the development of people.

Based on this description of social intelligence, this volume, consisting of 22 chapters by a number of authors, covers a wide range of topics pertaining to deal with social intelligence. Areas that are covered include, amongst others, the political, economic, technological and socio-cultural fields. This is furthermore discussed from various cultural perspectives, such as the Eastern (Japanese, Chinese), Western and African perspectives.

The role of social intelligence in the political arena is discussed from the angle of the role of traditional intelligence services. From an economic point of view business intelligence, which is referred to as the privatization of intelligence, is specifically emphasized. The chapter by S.

Dedjijer entitled 'Does IBM know what business it is in?' should be recommended in this regard. The relationship between technology and social intelligence also features prominently. Four chapters are devoted to this topic. Two of these deal with techno-economic intelligence (INTELL). The problem of indigenization of technology, (referred to as 'indigenous technology capacity' or ITC) is discussed by Onyango under the heading 'Indigenous technology capacity: can social intelligence help? A Kenyan case study'. In the well-structured contribution of Drexler on the role of hypertext in the evolution of knowledge, the author posits that hypertext publishing can be used as an effective medium for the evolution of knowledge, specifically in improving the variation, replication and selection of ideas.

Of specific importance for the South African context is the chapter by Sturges, Mchombu and Neill entitled 'The indigenous knowledge base in African development'. In their contribution, the authors clearly illustrate that the attitudes in Africa towards information have contributed to some of the economic and political failures in Africa. As a solution they suggest a reassessment of indigenous knowledge (as a form of self-knowledge) and indicate how this can contribute to new strategies for development in Africa.

A few points of criticism should, however, be raised. The first is that one of the main concepts, namely development, is not adequately defined in the context of social intelligence. This is illustrated by the fact that only a few chapters pertinently address the role of social intelligence in development. It is felt that too much emphasis is furthermore placed on the role of social intelligence in the organization and society, while the role of the individual (which is emphasized in the introduction) is underplayed.

A few of the authors work from the assumption that the reader has some prior knowledge of the concepts and even acronyms that are used. This problem should probably have been addressed at an editorial level. Standardization of format of presentation and more careful proof-reading could have contributed further to an end product that would do the excellent content justice.

The increasing importance of the subject of social intelligence makes this volume compulsory professional reading.

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