

TRIARCHIC THEORY OF INTELLIGENCE

The triarchic theory of intelligence proposes that there are three distinct types of intelligence: practical, distinct, and analytical. It was formulated by Robert J. Sternberg, a well-known psychologist whose research often focuses on human intelligence and creativity.

The triarchic theory is comprised of three subtheories, each of which relates to a specific kind of intelligence: the contextual subtheory, which corresponds to practical intelligence, or the ability to successfully function in one's environment; the experiential subtheory, which corresponds to creative intelligence, or the ability to deal with novel situations or issues; and the componential subtheory, which corresponds to analytical intelligence, or the ability to solve problems.

Origins

Sternberg proposed his theory in 1985 as an alternative to the idea of the general intelligence factor. The general intelligence factor, also known as *g*, is what intelligence tests typically measure. It refers only to "academic intelligence."

Sternberg argued that practical intelligence—a person's ability to react and adapt to the world around them—as well as creativity are equally important when measuring an individual's overall intelligence. He also argued that intelligence isn't fixed, but rather comprises a set of abilities that can be developed. Sternberg's assertions led to the creation of his theory.

Subtheories

Sternberg broke his theory down into the following three subtheories:

Contextual subtheory: The contextual subtheory says that intelligence is intertwined with the individual's environment. Thus, intelligence is based on the way one functions in their everyday circumstances, including one's ability to a) adapt to one's environment, b) select the best environment for oneself, or c) shape the environment to better fit one's needs and desires.

Experiential subtheory: The experiential subtheory proposes that there is a continuum of experience from novel to automation to which intelligence can be applied. It's at the extremes of this continuum that intelligence is best demonstrated. At the novel end of the spectrum, an individual is confronted with an unfamiliar task or situation and must come

up with a way to deal with it. At the automation end of the spectrum, one has become familiar with a given task or situation and can now handle it with minimal thought.

Componential subtheory: The componential theory outlines the various mechanisms that result in intelligence. According to Sternberg, this subtheory is comprised of three kinds of mental processes or components:

- **Metacomponents** enable us to monitor, control, and evaluate our mental processing, so that we can make decisions, solve problems, and create plans.
- **Performance components** are what enable us to take action on the plans and decisions arrived at by the metacomponents.
- **Knowledge-acquisition components** enable us to learn new information that will help us carry out our plans.

Kinds of Intelligence

Each subtheory reflects a particular kind of intelligence or ability:

- **Practical intelligence:** Sternberg called one's ability to successfully interact with the everyday world practical intelligence. Practical intelligence is related to the contextual subtheory. Practically intelligent people are especially adept at behaving in successful ways in their external environment.
- **Creative intelligence:** The experiential subtheory is related to creative intelligence, which is one's ability to use existing knowledge to create new ways to handle new problems or cope in new situations.
- **Analytical intelligence:** The componential subtheory is related to analytical intelligence, which is essentially academic intelligence. Analytical intelligence is used to solve problems and is the kind of intelligence that is measured by a standard IQ test

Sternberg observed that all three kinds of intelligence are necessary for successful intelligence, which refers to the ability to be successful in life based on one's abilities, personal desires, and environment.

Critiques

There have been a number of critiques and challenges to Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence over the years. For example, educational psychologist Linda Gottfredson says the theory lacks a solid empirical basis and observes that the data used to back up the theory is meager. In addition, some scholars argue that practical intelligence is redundant with the concept of job knowledge, a concept that is more robust and has been better

researched. Finally, Sternberg's own definitions and explanations of his terms and concepts have at times been imprecise.

References:

- Sternberg, Robert J. "The Theory of Successful Intelligence" *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1999, 292-316.
- "Triarchic Theory of Intelligence." Psychestudy.