

# Curiosity Is as Important as Intelligence

by Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic

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There seems to be wide support for the idea that we are living in an “age of complexity”, which implies that the world has never been more intricate. This idea is based on the rapid pace of technological changes, and the vast amount of information that we are generating (the two are related). Yet consider that philosophers like Leibniz (17<sup>th</sup> century) and Diderot (18<sup>th</sup> century) were already complaining about information overload. The “horrible mass of books” they referred to may have represented only a tiny portion of what we know today, but much of what we know today will be equally insignificant to future generations.

In any event, the relative complexity of different eras is of little matter to the person who is simply struggling to cope with it in everyday life. So perhaps the right question is not “Is this era more complex?” but “Why are some people more able to manage complexity?” Although complexity is context-dependent, it is also determined by a person’s disposition. In particular, there are three key psychological qualities that enhance our ability to manage complexity:

**1. IQ:** As most people know, IQ stands for intellectual quotient and refers to mental ability. What fewer people know, or like to accept, is that IQ *does* affect a wide range of real-world outcomes, such as job performance and objective career success. The main reason is that higher levels of IQ enable people to learn and solve novel problems faster. At face value, IQ

tests seem quite abstract, mathematical, and disconnected from everyday life problems, yet they are a powerful tool to predict our ability to manage complexity. In fact, IQ is a much stronger predictor of performance on complex tasks than on simple ones.

Complex environments are richer in information, which creates more cognitive load and demands more brainpower or deliberate thinking from us; we cannot navigate them in autopilot (or Kahneman's system 1 thinking). IQ is a measure of that brainpower, just like megabytes or processing speed are a measure of the operations a computer can perform, and at what speed. Unsurprisingly, there is a substantial correlation between IQ and working memory, our mental capacity for handling multiple pieces of temporary information at once. Try memorizing a phone number while asking someone for directions and remembering your shopping list, and you will get a good sense of your IQ. (Unfortunately, research shows that working memory training does not enhance our long-term ability to deal with complexity, though some evidence suggests that it delays mental decline in older people, as per the "use it or lose it" theory.)

**2) EQ:** EQ stands for emotional quotient and concerns our ability to perceive, control, and express emotions. EQ relates to complexity management in three main ways. First, individuals with higher EQ are less susceptible to stress and anxiety. Since complex situations are resourceful and demanding, they are likely to induce pressure and stress, but high EQ acts as a buffer. Second, EQ is a key ingredient of interpersonal skills, which means that people with higher EQ are better equipped to navigate complex organizational politics and advance in their careers. Indeed, even in today's hyper-connected world what most employers look for is not technical expertise, but soft skills, especially when it comes to management and leadership roles. Third, people with higher EQ tend to be more entrepreneurial, so they are more proactive at exploiting opportunities, taking risks, and turning creative ideas into actual innovations. All this makes EQ an important quality for adapting to uncertain, unpredictable, and complex environments.

**3) CQ:** CQ stands for curiosity quotient and concerns having a hungry mind. People with higher CQ are more inquisitive and open to new experiences. They find novelty exciting and are quickly bored with routine. They tend to generate many original ideas and are counter-conformist. It has not been as deeply studied as EQ and IQ, but there's some

evidence to suggest it is just as important when it comes to managing complexity in two major ways. First, individuals with higher CQ are generally more tolerant of ambiguity. This is a good combination of skills that helps to define the way we manage complexity.

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over time, especially in formal domains of education, such as science and art (note: this is of course different from IQ's measurement of raw intellectual horsepower). Knowledge and expertise, much like experience, translate complex situations into familiar ones, so CQ is the ultimate tool to produce simple solutions for complex problems.

Although IQ is hard to coach, EQ and CQ can be developed. As Albert Einstein famously said: ““I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.”

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Cafecivility 5 months ago

You've hit the nail on the head with this thoughtful article. In many learning environments there is an over emphasis on IQ and rigor. There's nothing wrong with academic excellence but focusing too narrowly on this leaves a void in our ability to relate with others beyond our digital connections. Your article elucidates the three components needed to successfully lead and navigate today's complex business and social environments. With effective coaching and training, anyone can learn to be more socially savvy and cultivate curiosity about the world. Great job.

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