

# How Catholic Spirituality Can Strengthen Emotional Competence in Managerial Situations\*

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In the 1980s, MBA education at America's leading business schools was purely technocratic. Students received a fine training in subjects such as accounting, portfolio theory, micro- and macroeconomics, and decision sciences. However, with the intermittent exception of a short course on communication skills, usually taught by an adjunct faculty member, there was scant attention paid to leadership, building productive interpersonal relationships, managing teams, or emotion in the workplace. Those subjects were often dismissed as "the soft stuff" by the standing faculty, many of them ex-engineers with a preference for large-sample, quantitative research studies often inspired by theoretical models from economics.

But as E.T. Bell once observed, "time makes fools of us all." It turned out that "the soft stuff" was really "the hard stuff." As the data on MBA careers began to pour in, it became clear that very few "high potential" executive careers derailed from lack of technical competence (See Exhibit 1).

The failure of business school faculties to address such issues fed the student perception that the quality and relevance of their education was a minor issue to the professoriate whose primary focus was publication of their own research.<sup>1</sup> It also illustrates the fragmentation of knowledge in the contemporary Academy caused by overspecialization.<sup>2</sup> Business school academics, for example, seldom interacted with their colleagues in Organizational Development, a field typically housed in university schools of education that addresses many of the defects in contemporary business education.

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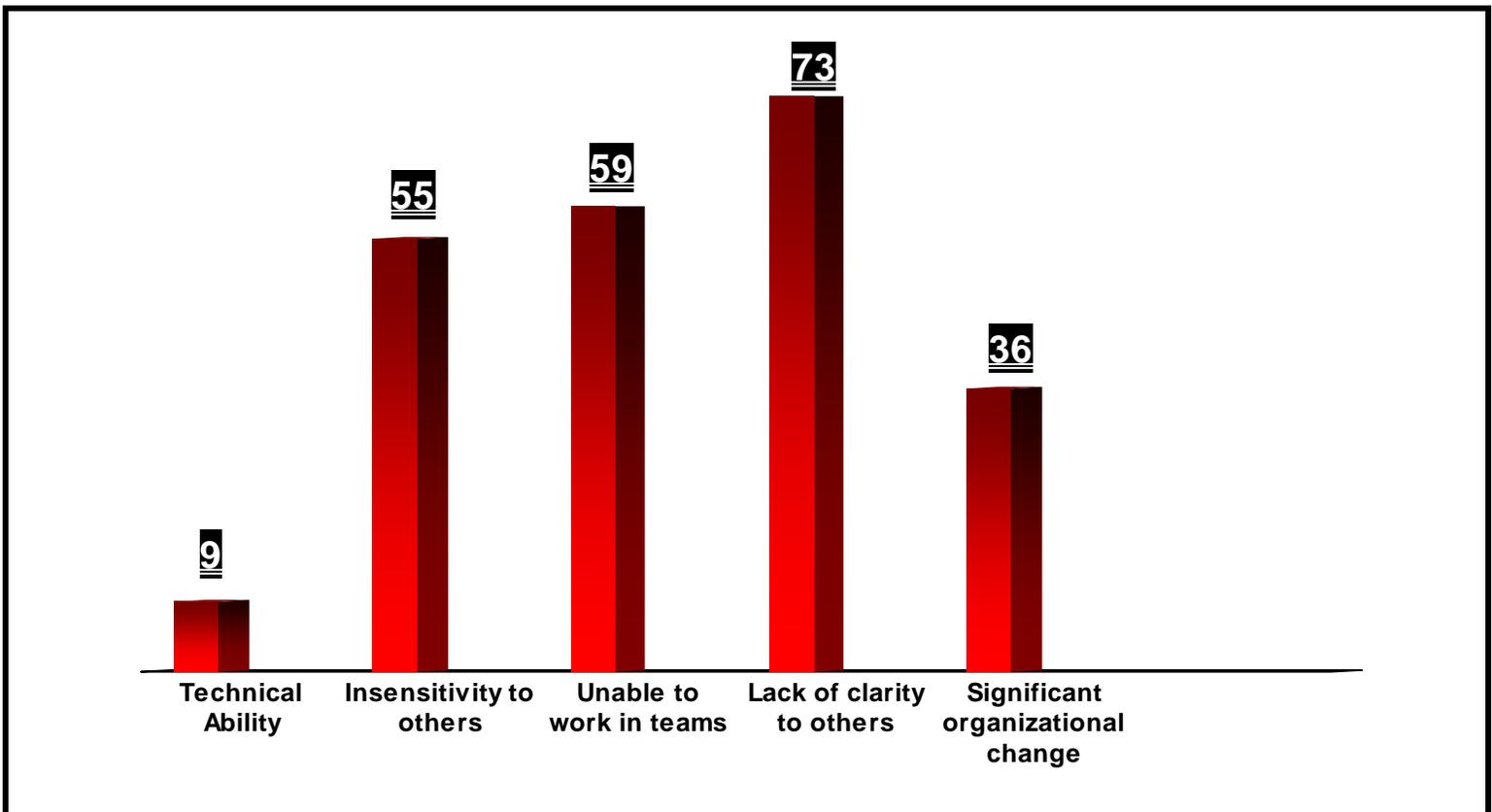
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<sup>1</sup>On the current intellectual malaise in American business schools, see Rakesh Khurana, From Higher Aims to Hired Hands: The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfulfilled Promise of Management as a Profession (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007), passim but esp. p.333ff; Jeffrey Pfeffer and Christina T. Fong, "The Business School Experience: Some lessons from the U.S. Experience," Stanford Graduate School of Business Research Paper No. 855; *idem*, "The End of Business Schools? Less Than Meets the Eye," Academy of Management Learning and Education, 2002 (Vol. 1, No.1), pp. 78-95; Harold J. Leavitt, "Educating our MBAs: On Teaching What We haven't Taught," California Management Review, 1989 (Vol. 31, No.3), pp. 38-50. For a rather splenetic student perspective on the curricular deficiencies of MBA education at a leading business school, see Peter Robinson, Snapshots from Hell: The Making of an MBA (New York: Warner Books, Inc, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> On the need for integration of the various university disciplines and the implicit dangers of this type of fragmentation, see Pope John Paul II, Ex Corde Ecclesiae, Chapter 16 and Robert M. Hutchins, The University of Utopia, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

## Why High Potential Careers Derail

Hay Group Fortune 500 Survey, 1999



Inspired by a more humanistic and holistic vision of management education, Richard Boyatzis and his associates at the Weatherhead School of Management (WSOM) at Case Western Reserve University have shown business schools a way out of this curricular imbalance. They redesigned their MBA curriculum and introduced, among other topics, self-directed learning of “emotional competencies.”<sup>3</sup>

To illustrate what we mean by “emotional competencies,” consider the following scenario, one that MBAs may well encounter at least once in their corporate careers. In this case, a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) executive had to inform his team that their division was closing, and they would be let go. Nothing compares for sheer misery with losing a job that is one’s livelihood. Such an eventuality is particularly burdensome for those at a time in life when age discrimination renders the prospect of re-employment uncertain.

As our executive sits at his desk alone pondering *what* to say and *how* to say it to his employees, we may ask parenthetically:

- *What business school course or experiential learning exercise has prepared him for this task?*
- *What emotional competencies will they draw on so that when they enter the room they connect with their workers and address their need for truth?*
- *What Catholic virtues might they apply to see the situation in the right way and use the emotion in the room to a good end?*

We address these three questions in our paper. But first, by way of introduction, we will provide the reader with further details of this scenario as it appears in its original source.<sup>4</sup> The authors, after presenting the scenario, give readers two contrasting approaches. The first executive:

“... started off with a glowing account of how well rival operations were doing, and that he had just returned from a wonderful trip to Cannes. ... People became enraged – not just at the management decision, but also at the bearer of the news himself. ...

The next day, another executive ... took a very different approach. He spoke from his heart ... about the calling that had drawn them to the field ... invoked the passion, even the dedication [they] had for the service they offered ... he wished them well in getting on with their careers. When this leader finished speaking, the staff cheered.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See in particular Richard E. Boyatzis, David A. Kolb, Scott S. Cowen, et al., *Innovation in Professional Education: Steps on a Journey from Teaching to Learning: The Story of Change and Invention at the Weatherhead School of Management* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1995). It offers deep insight into the problems referenced above and provides a fascinating and unique case study of what curriculum redesign at an established business school entails.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), pp. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The second executive's ability to inspire his team in the same situation well illustrates the concept of emotional competence as presented in Primal Leadership. Its authors are primarily concerned with *effective performance* of the kind the second executive above exemplified. He successfully brought about the desired outcome by helping the division come to terms with the BBC decision and thus get on with the next phase of their careers.

How did he do it? On what emotional competencies did he draw? One was clearly *empathy*. He empathized with the team's situation, honoring the bonds uniting them and their commitment to their vocation of journalism. Other competencies the executive embodied were *persuasiveness* and *developing others*. He persuaded the team by helping them to perceive the situation in a new light: we can imagine the dark moods befogging the minds of team members lifting as he spoke.

As psychologists have demonstrated, emotions affect our decision-making and our readiness to engage in action. We make better decisions when we are in good moods. This observation helps explain the assertions made in Primal Leadership that optimistic and emotionally aware executives tend to be more effective than their impulsive, moody colleagues: emotionally "resonant" leaders are able to motivate teams to superior performance.

But as a postscript to this scenario, we note that the authors are silent about the ethical context of the executive's speech. Did he perhaps persuade them to acquiesce in an unfair or unethical decision by BBC management? Perhaps there was an alternative option the BBC top brass would have considered if they were forcefully challenged? There is nothing intrinsic to the emotional competence model presented in Primal Leadership that would prevent our executive from being emotionally intelligent but morally disengaged.

Interest in emotional competencies presents a major challenge and opportunity for Catholic business schools (CBSs). The idea that MBAs, to be successful, need to cultivate such competencies as "self-management," "empathy" and "character" represents a tremendous advance in management education, and a step toward an authentically Catholic view of education focused on the formation of the whole human person. On the one hand, CBSs stand to benefit from the psychologists' recent research findings about emotions and behavior. On the other hand, CBSs can offer improvements to emotional competence theory from within our own tradition that can lead to a more morally robust understanding of emotion.

We would even argue that the conceptual model behind emotional competencies threatens to set back management thinking if it promotes a decision-making model that gives primacy to "emotional intelligence" at the expense of rigorous moral reasoning. There is an emerging awareness that management specialists, having discovered "emotional intelligence," have forgotten practical ethics, and that in formulating the emotional competency concept, psychologists neglected to draw on the insights of their colleagues in moral philosophy.

In our view, CBSs have an opportunity to strengthen the concept and application of emotional competence by synthesizing two streams of thinking bearing on the role of emotion in decision-making. There is much to be gained from the research by psychologists regarding how individuals size up emotional situations, specifically, how individuals perceive, gather, and use emotional information and how emotions shape behavior. These insights, while preliminary and

subject to controversy, are important, given the close and complex relation of emotions to behavior. Psychologists have also done a service by bringing the discussion of emotion and behavior into public debate and showing the wide social implications. But since emotions are morally neutral, there is a clear opportunity to enrich the debate through recourse to Catholic thought regarding the action of the virtues in restraining or directing impulsive behavior consistent with desirable moral ends.

In what follows we review the promise of the emotional competence model and the WSOM experience teaching it. We then step back and reflect on its critical deficiency: moral agnosticism. For this analysis, we will draw heavily on a powerful Aristotelian critique of emotional competence developed by Professor Kristján Kristjánsson.<sup>6</sup> We believe his critique of emotional competence theory is powerful and deserves to be much better known than it is at present. We finally consider emotional competencies in the context of Catholic virtue theory. We explore how the virtues might aid individuals in using their emotional competencies *in the right way and for the right ends*. We will also suggest some spiritual exercises that CBSs might consider to engage students and executives in real-life situations that test and strengthen moral virtue and emotional competencies.

## **I. Emotional Competencies in Theory and in the Classroom**

Recent psychological studies have shed useful light on emotions, what they are, what they are for, and how they color decision-making. Much of this research has been stimulated by a few seminal works on “emotional intelligence” (EI).<sup>7</sup> While the concept of an independent “emotional intelligence” remains controversial, the studies and especially the evidence that emotional skills make people more successful at work provide much of potential benefit to management educators. We next provide a brief summary of the state of the EI field and examine in some detail the approach to teaching “emotional competencies” at WSOM.

First we should point out the vagueness in the use of terms “emotional intelligence” and “emotional competencies.” This definitional ambiguity reveals the state of the field, the divisions within it over how to characterize the psychological processes associated with emotion, and the critical questions necessary to advance the theory. We are not competent to judge the debate or various approaches, but to summarize, we understand “emotional intelligence” in its technical meaning as relating to a *potential* to learn specific cognitive abilities: EI would be analogous to IQ, verbal intelligence. Emotional competencies, by contrast, might be thought of as *learning potential realized*.

The competency approach draws on social and organizational psychology and learning theory. One senses the influence here of Boyatzis’s colleague who was his collaborator in the WSOM MBA redesign, David Kolb. Kolb is one of the leading specialists in adult learning and leadership studies.<sup>8</sup> The competency approach informs the materials developed by the authors of

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<sup>6</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, “‘Emotional Intelligence’ in the Classroom? An Aristotelian Critique,” *Educational Theory*, 2006 (Vol. 56, No. 1), pp. 39-56.

<sup>7</sup> See the succinct literature review by J. D. Mayer, P. Salovey, and D. R. Caruso, “Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings, and Implications,” *Psychological Inquiry*, 2004 (Vol. 15, No. 3), 197-215.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

Primal Leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee). To a large extent, the use of “emotional competency” versus EI reflects the specialists’ divergent research goals. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee are more interested in practical questions related to what emotional abilities correlate with success, than the technical and theoretical questions relating to whether EI meets the criteria of an “intelligence.” We found that both the EI and the competency conceptual models offered theoretical and practical value.

Emotional intelligence emerged as a topic of academic debate relatively recently: the field is young and dominated by a few well known personalities. The first articles to use the term “emotional intelligence” were written in 1990.<sup>9</sup> The co-authors, Professors John Mayer and Peter Salovey, were the first to explicitly define EI and propose a theory and demonstration of it. They were influenced by Howard Gardiner’s work revisiting the concept of “intelligence” and suggesting there might be multiple specific intelligences.<sup>10</sup> As we mentioned, there are plenty of skeptics challenging Mayer, Salovey, and David Caruso on this question of whether “emotional intelligence” constitutes an independent research construct, distinct from personality, and, notably, Howard Gardner counts among the critics.<sup>11</sup>

Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso did the young field a great service by establishing early on a research agenda based loosely on their “four branch” conceptual model of the skills and abilities associated with emotional intelligence. In their 1990 articles, Mayer and Salovey articulated a view of emotions as reasoned responses to situations resulting from *appraisals of information*. They argued that the experience of emotions involves cognition at various levels, from perception (the lowest level) to understanding and management. Emotional intelligence relates to an ability to discern a meaningful pattern of *signals*, often associated with relationships critical to survival. Thus a recent volume has argued that emotional intelligence may be an *adaptive competence*: an ability to size particular relationships up quickly and choose effective strategies. Emotional intelligence abilities are multidimensional: they encompass a range of skills that make us good at deciding quickly how to adapt our behavior based on context.<sup>12</sup>

In the late 1990s, EI studies took a sharp turn, as a group of Ph.D. psychologists and management specialists took the EI findings out of the narrow confines of the academy and put them to the test in solving real world problems in higher education and business. Thus began the competency-based approach to EI, taught at WSOM and in executive seminars by the human resources consultancy, the Hay Group. The catalyst was the 1995 publication by Daniel

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, J.D. Mayer, M. T. DiPaolo, and P. Salovey, “Perceiving Affective Content in Ambiguous Visual Stimuli: A Component of Emotional Intelligence,” Journal of Personality Assessment, 1990 (vol. 54), pp. 772-781; and P. Salovey and J.D. Mayer, “Emotional Intelligence,” Imagination, Cognition, and Personality 1990 (vol. 9), pp. 185-211. Reuven Bar-on is another critical early contributor to the field of emotional competence. He invented the term “EQ” (“emotional quotient”) and developed a leading instrument to measure it. A comprehensive list of his publications is available on his web site at <http://www.reuvenbaron.org>.

<sup>10</sup> Howard Gardiner, Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> For a critical survey of the emotional intelligence field, see Gerald Matthews, Moshe Zeidner, and Richard D. Roberts, Emotional Intelligence: Science and Myth (MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> ibid., p. 171.

Goleman, a Ph.D. psychologist, of *Emotional Intelligence*, explaining EI to the lay reader.<sup>13</sup> Goleman argued that “EI” is what distinguishes the stars in any walk of life from the rank and file. The public took notice, and *Emotional Intelligence* became a major bestseller.

*Emotional Intelligence* irked many scholars in the field who claimed that Goleman, a science journalist, popularized a scientifically unsound concept of EI. There is some confusion as to what Goleman means by “EI.” Goleman characterized the relationship of EI and emotional competence as follows in his introduction to the tenth anniversary edition of *Emotional Intelligence*:

“While our emotional intelligence determines our potential for learning the fundamentals of self-mastery and the like, our emotional competence shows how much of that potential we have mastered in ways that translate into on-the-job capabilities.”<sup>14</sup>

EI in Goleman’s view is closely associated with self-awareness, the knowledge and abilities that enable some people to master their impulses and moods consistent with their goals. Goleman, more so than others in the field, draws heavily on the neuroscience of emotions, the hard wiring in the brain that shapes emotional experience.

Meanwhile, separately from Goleman, Boyatzis and his colleagues at WSOM were creating their model of emotional competencies in the process of redesigning the MBA degree program. These competencies were to be the “tools of leadership,” critical for MBAs to succeed in the workplace. Boyatzis has generously published WSOM’s instruments and lesson plans.<sup>15</sup> WSOM students are assessed at the beginning and conclusion of their studies to assess change outcomes. In measuring MBAs at WSOM, Boyatzis’s team used four competency testing instruments. They encompass a variety of approaches, including self- and external assessment questionnaires, group discussion exercises, and critical incident interviews. The WSOM “model of knowledge” includes a subset of 8 emotional intelligence competencies categorized as “people management abilities,” including: Empathy, Persuasiveness, Networking, Negotiating, Self-Confidence, Group Management, Developing Others, and Oral Communication.

Recently, Goleman and Boyatzis teamed with Anne McKee, a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania then teaching in the Wharton School’s Leadership Program, in creating an Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI).<sup>16</sup> In brief, the ECI is a multi-rater instrument that provides self- and external-report on a series of behaviors indicating emotional intelligence. Goleman’s influence shows in the definitions of competencies, managing one’s impulses, which shows his interest in the neocortical and limbic systems.<sup>17</sup> But about 40% of the ECI comes

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 10th edition (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), p. xv.

<sup>15</sup> Boyatzis, Cowen, Kolb, and Associates, pp. 82-91. For a description, see the important study of Richard Boyatzis, Elizabeth Stubbs, and Scott Taylor, “Learning Cognitive and Emotional Intelligence Competencies through Graduate Management Education,” *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 2002 (vol. 1, no. 2), pp. 150-162.

<sup>16</sup> See Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, pp. 253-256.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998).

from the Self-Assessment Questionnaire that Boyatzis developed for use at WSOM. Presented as a “360-degree tool,” the ECI is already being used at WSOM and in the executive education programs offered by the Hay Group, and claims a track record of success.<sup>18</sup> We should note, however, that a recent volume expresses skepticism regarding the scientific validity of the inventory.<sup>19</sup>

We will not compare Goleman’s conception of EI to the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso four-branch model. The ECI does appear to mix cognitive abilities with personality traits. Common to both approaches are the abilities to manage emotion, reflect on emotional signals and thereby avoid being blind-sided by emotion.

Version 2 of the ECI comprises four domains and 20 distinct competencies.<sup>20</sup> The domains are defined as follows:

- Self-Awareness: Knowing one’s internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions.
- Self-Management: Managing one’s internal states, impulses, and resources.
- Social Awareness: How people handle relationships and awareness of others’ feelings, needs, and concerns.
- Relationship Management: Skill or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others.

Table 1: Self-Awareness and Self-Management Competencies

Self-Awareness	Self-Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional self-awareness: reading one’s own emotions and recognizing their impact, using “gut sense” to guide decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Self-Control: Managing disruptive emotions and impulses.</li> <li>• Transparency or trustworthiness: Maintaining standards of honesty and integrity.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurate self-assessment: Knowing one’s strengths and limits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievement: Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-confidence: Sureness about one’s self-worth and capabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptability: Flexibility in handling change.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiative: Readiness to act on opportunities.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimism: Persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks.</li> </ul>

<sup>18</sup> See C. Cherniss, “The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence,” available on the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence for Organizations website ([www.eiconsortium.org](http://www.eiconsortium.org)).

<sup>19</sup> For a critical analysis of the emotional intelligence field, see Gerald Matthews, Moshe Zeidner, and Richard D. Roberts, *Emotional Intelligence: Science and Myth* (MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> For the latest version of the ECI and information on sources, see the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence for Organizations website.

The first two domains, self awareness and self-management, correspond to “personal competence,” how we manage ourselves. In Primal Leadership, we read that self-management refers to abilities that “free us from being prisoner of our feelings.” The authors emphasize the role of the pre-frontal area of the brain that inhibits the neural action associated with “blind rage” or profound distress. We can easily imagine how emotional self-awareness and self-management are associated with business success: co-workers, clients, board members, customers all tend to respond favorably to leaders who remain optimistic under pressure, who radiate self-confidence, who create trust. Interestingly, we read in Primal Leadership, “self-management also enables transparency,” which is defined as “an authentic openness to others about one’s feelings, beliefs, and actions.”

Social Awareness	Relationship management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy: Sensing others’ feelings and perspective, and taking an active interest in their concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspirational leadership: Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational awareness: Reading the currents, decision networks, and politics at the organizational level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence: Wielding effective tactics for persuasion.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service: Anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers’ needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing others: Bolstering others’ abilities through feedback and guidance.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change catalyst: Initiating, managing, and leading in a new direction.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict management: Negotiating and resolving disagreements.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building bonds: Cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork and collaboration: Cooperation and team building</li> </ul>

The third and fourth domains, “social awareness” and “relationship management,” comprise our “social competence,” the ability to manage relationships. In Primal Leadership, we are told that the social competencies, such as “empathy,” are caused by brain function: neurons in circuitry involved in reading another’s face and voice for emotion that gives us an intuitive feel for how someone else feels as we speak. There is literally a kind of “limbic resonance” whereby two people harmonize their emotions. Empathy is defined as this ability to remain attuned to others’ feelings, and thus “calm fears, assuage anger, or join in good spirits.” We told further that empathetic leaders are able to sense values and priorities of the group, weigh them intelligently in decision-making, and at least acknowledge them in communicating decisions. We saw this competence demonstrated in the BBC scenario we described in this paper’s opening.

Relationship management marks the highest level of competence, and includes persuasion, conflict management, and collaboration, among others. The set of competencies under “relationship management” are “friendliness with a purpose: moving people in the right direction.”

To summarize the strengths of the model, the ECI, when used in a self-directed learning program, helps students to assess and reflect on the very deficiencies most likely to derail their management careers. WSOM also requires students to create learning plans to address their deficiencies.

We think the ECI represents a major advance within the context of management education. And there is evidence – disputed to be sure – that the competencies the ECI isolates do indeed correlate with success. Earlier we cited evidence for the business case that emotional competencies are associated with superior managerial performance.

We can learn something additionally important from how the ECI is used at WSOM. Based on assessment data gathered since its introduction in the WSOM MBA program in 1990, there is evidence that what made the difference for students was a course on leadership assessment and self-directed learning theory incorporating a wide range of learning activities.<sup>21</sup> The authors of the ECI have created a curriculum tailored to the individual: the ECI materials begin with assessments of each student’s emotional and cognitive competencies, and engage the students in creating individual learning plans, based on their particular values, motives, and weaknesses.

The ECI offers a partial solution to a larger problem confronting CBSs: the need to broaden the scope of MBA programs to encompass formation of the whole human person. The ECI appears to offer a means of engaging students in asking such questions as: what kind of person am I and what type of person do I want to be? How do I need to change to be a better leader? How can I improve at handling my emotions and responding to others’?

While the EI and ECI studies shed much light on the nature of emotions, there are few studies that consider the element of moral choice in the application of emotional competencies. It would seem that emotional intelligence as it relates to decision-making needs to address the issue of moral choice. If the EI specialists are correct that emotional intelligence at its highest level encompasses an ability to reflect (however briefly) on emotional signals and adapt behavior quickly, is it not critical to determine whether an adaptation is ethical versus merely effective versus basely manipulative?

We put this question to Professor Mayer in an email, asking whether he and his colleagues collaborate at all with moral philosophers in identifying or exploring possible cross-over between emotional intelligence and practical ethics. Professor Mayer acknowledged that he was aware of the ethical dimensions of his research but said that his team had not engaged philosophers in collaborative research “although we should.”<sup>22</sup> As is often the case with cross-cutting issues, few EI specialists have examined emotional functioning from its neural, psychological, *and* moral vantage points.

To conclude, we note that a few scholars have studied the ethical dimensions and implications of emotional competence. One study posed an interesting ethical issue: while it is clearly valuable to understand emotional signals when they are expressed intentionally, what about when

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<sup>21</sup> Boyatzis, Cowen, Kolb, and Associates, pp. 50-91.

<sup>22</sup> Email correspondence between Emily Pyle and Jack Mayer, October 26, 2007.

emotions are unintentional?<sup>23</sup> One needs to know how to regulate one's emotional competence to restrain a desire to "eavesdrop," which can be associated with poor performance and excessive sociability. The author argues that the important issue is how people *use* emotional information, not merely that they perceive it.

In his study of "negative emotions," such as anger or fear, W. Gerrod Parrott explained that such emotions are perhaps better understood as negative assessments of situations. At its highest level, emotional intelligence involves reflection on situations, and this process shapes our experience of fear or mild concern. He explored what determines whether we appraise situations consistently with our goals. Parrott showed how these assessments of emotional situations affect decision-making. To be sure, our emotional assessments color our decisions. But he also pointed out that ethics play a governing role as well.<sup>24</sup>

## **II. An Aristotelian Critique of the Emotional Competency Model**

In his best selling books on EI, Daniel Goleman references Aristotle as a key source for his thinking about EI.<sup>25</sup> There are indeed similarities in how Goleman and Aristotle view the emotions. Both thinkers, for example, see no dichotomy between reason and emotion. Quite the contrary. They see harmony between reason and emotion as central to a successfully lived life.

But there are reasons to doubt that EI as it is presently constituted has the same "moral ballast" as Aristotelian virtue theory.<sup>26</sup> Kristjánsson contrasts EI and Aristotle's virtue theory on 8 different dimensions. In each case, EI theory comes up short causing Kristjánsson to conclude that EI represents only "a lean and impoverished" version of Aristotelian emotional virtue. His EI critique is probing and reminds one of Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of the increasingly "spectral" nature of the Aristotelian and Thomistic notion of moral virtue in Modernity. We summarize Kristjánsson's 8-point critique below.

### General Psychological Domain

Goleman states: "There is an old fashioned word for the body of skills that emotional intelligence represents: character."<sup>27</sup> But if the notion of character already exists and, furthermore, if it is better specified as a research concept, then why do we need EI?

### General Aim

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<sup>23</sup> Hillary Anger Elfenbein, Abigail A. Marsh, and Nalini Ambady, "Emotional Intelligence and the Recognition of Emotion from Facial Expressions," in The Wisdom in Feeling : Psychological Processes in Emotional Intelligence (New York : Guilford Press, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> W. Gerrod Parrott, "The Functional Utility of Negative Emotions," in ibid.

<sup>25</sup>See Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), pp. 56, 59 and passim.

<sup>26</sup>Kristjánsson, p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, p. 285; Kristjánsson, ibid.

Goleman never offers us a precise definition of the “good life” that the practice of EI is supposed to produce although he uses words like “success,” “prosperity,” and “happiness” as descriptors of it. In his later writings, Goleman appears to equate the “good life” with monetary success. This shift occurs pari passu with the change in focus in his later writings from the EI of the individual to the EI of organizations and, especially, business organizations. In his later works, Goleman is much concerned, for example, with how much more profit the emotionally intelligent executive will generate for a firm.

These views of the “good life” raise questions about the moral orientation of EI theory. Both in Goleman’s earlier and later writings the focus is solely on what benefits the application of EI can bring to the practitioner. It focuses on the “I.” But an adequate moral stance requires an “I” and “Thou” relationship. Ethical conduct requires the augmentation of another’s well being in addition to our own. In contrast to Aristotle, there is therefore no clear indication in EI that the intelligent use of our emotions involves a moral component. EI appears morally agnostic.

#### Characteristic Mode of Thought

Following on this last point, Kristjánsson observes that there is in Aristotle’s view a characteristic mode of thought that accompanies every type of human activity. So “techne” (technical skill or thinking) will guide “poiesis” (making or creation) whereas “phronesis” (practical moral wisdom) will guide the moral virtues. Phronesis tells us what specific actions to take to achieve moral virtue. There can be no real phronesis absent a goal of moral virtue.

There is, however, another type of thinking contained within phronesis but not equivalent to it: cleverness. Cleverness is a more utilitarian form of thinking that is focused on efficiency and effectiveness. Aristotle claims that if the end toward which cleverness is directed is good, then cleverness is “praiseworthy.” If the end is ignoble, cleverness will degenerate into mere “unscrupulousness.” Given that EI appears to be morally agnostic, cleverness rather than phronesis would appear to be its characteristic mode of thought.

#### Criterion of Actualization

The psychometric instrument most often used to measure EI is Reuven Bar-On’s Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i). It asks individuals to score themselves on a variety of emotional traits and abilities. Quite apart from the usual potential for bias in any self-evaluation, there is a more serious problem here. The measure of EI in the EQ-i and similar instruments is self-satisfaction. In other words, if I feel good, I must be emotionally intelligent or balanced.

But I can also feel pleasure in the course of morally negative emotions such as *Schadenfreude*. Subjective pleasure in itself is therefore an amoral assessment criterion. An Aristotelian version of such a criterion, Kristjánsson suggests, might be subjective pleasure derived from appropriately moral emotions.<sup>28</sup>

#### Emotional Scope

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<sup>28</sup> Kristjánsson, p. 47.

Goleman opens his classic book on EI with the famous quote from Aristotle on anger: “The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, is praised. This will be the good tempered man.”<sup>29</sup>

At first sight this reference appears to imply that Goleman supports Aristotle’s contention that emotional virtue embraces both pleasant and painful emotions. But later in the text Goleman speaks extensively about the damage that negative emotions and feelings can have on human health, specifically on the heart, and on the beneficial health impact of positive emotions. Rather than experience appropriate anger in the right way and in the right amount, Goleman appears to wish to banish anger or to bring it into a space where it can be controlled by reason rather than experienced appropriately in its pure and unalloyed form.

In his later work, Goleman goes even further down this path and speaks of “negative emotions” that can “powerfully disrupt work” and render people “emotionally unintelligent.” The Aristotelian idea that there is an appropriate place and time for negative emotion virtually disappears in Goleman’s later work.<sup>30</sup>

#### Focus of “Self-Science”

Goleman contends that EI and its practice will yield a new science of the self. The two primary components of that science will be “self-awareness” and “self-control.” Self-aware persons know their own emotional strengths and weaknesses (and how they interact) in depth and are therefore well positioned to control their disruptive emotions rationally.

But recall that Goleman started out in agreement with Aristotle that head is not supposed to rule heart. The two were to work together in a mutually enriching way. In most cases, Aristotle does not focus on controlling or limiting the experience of the emotions. He instead encourages us to experience the emotions in full but to hit the mean between their vices of excess and deficiency.

Kristjánsson speculates that if Aristotle were to offer us a “self-science” it would focus not on self-control but on self-respect. His concern is that by suppressing legitimate anger in the interest of “self-control,” we will run the risk of brooking insults at the expense of our human dignity. Self-respect requires legitimate anger in defense of one’s self-worth.

#### Perspective on Conflicts

For Goleman, conflict resolution is a core competency of EI. Faced with sharply conflicting emotions, the emotionally intelligent person, in possession of the self-science of self-awareness and self-control, will seek to resolve the tensions by compromise. “Were he alive today,” Goleman opines, “Aristotle, so concerned with emotional skillfulness, might well approve.”

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<sup>29</sup>Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, 1125b 30-34.

<sup>30</sup> For an insightful Catholic view on the proper role and spiritual necessity of righteous anger, see B.W. Maturin, Self-Knowledge and Self-Discipline: How To Know Yourself (Paterson, N.J: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1939), pp.183-4.

In contrast, Kristjánsson contends Aristotle would see little good in conflict resolution as an end in itself. If a compromise could be reached that respected the truth, Aristotle would be the first to enter into it. But if “conflict resolution” is simply a code word for conflict avoidance to preserve a false sense of personal tranquility, especially if issues of truth were at stake, Aristotle would object vigorously.

In this context, Kristjánsson cites an interesting critique of EI by David Carr.<sup>31</sup> Carr contends that EI privileges “emotional harmony, integration or other resolution of unease and conflict” at the expense of more significant human goods. He argues that EI-informed therapy, if applied to Hamlet, would seek to diminish his emotional conflicts and indecision and assuage his vengeful impulses in the interest of achieving personal tranquility. Carr seems inclined to leave those conflicts to simmer and concentrate instead on having Hamlet scrutinize his motives.

Both critics see an independent value to conflict. They believe it should not be artificially diminished or “resolved” in the interest of tranquility. Kristjánsson, for example, cites John Stuart Mill on the necessity of conflict to democratic self-governance and asks whether we really understand the full implications of negating legitimate conflict in the interest of harmony.

#### Desired Emotional End State

Whereas Goleman appears to argue for an emotional end state of tranquility derived from self-awareness and self-control, Kristjánsson contends that Aristotle’s preferred end state is one of emotional vigor. By vigor, he means a state where creativity, conflict, and assertiveness remain free from rational control and allowed to provide the human goods that only they can furnish.

Goleman believes EI has a very important potential role to play in strengthening the capabilities we need to act morally. The connection between EI and morality comes through empathy. It is empathy that allows us to practice caring, compassion and altruism.

But empathy is not itself a virtue; it is merely a condition for having virtues if used in the proper way. The problem with empathy, as Kristjánsson sees it, is that empathy is morally neutral. It allows us to feel someone else’s pain but does not compel us to moral action, i.e., to do something to alleviate that pain or suffering. Indeed, it may be the means by which we delight in another’s pain or misfortune as in the case of Schadenfreude or pure malice.

The crux of Kristjánsson’s critique of EI is its lack of moral depth. There is nothing intrinsic to EI that would prevent someone of Machiavellian persuasion from using EI techniques to sell defective used cars more effectively to an unsuspecting public. Absent a firm moral substrate to stand upon, the techniques of EI can only be judged by the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness. And as the sad century we have just left behind has taught us, amoral knowledge that fosters greater efficiency and effectiveness can easily be applied to the construction of better gas chambers.

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<sup>31</sup> David Carr, “Feelings in Moral Conflict and the Hazards of Emotional Intelligence,” Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, 2005 (No.1), pp. 3-21.

We regard Kristjánsson's critique as a fundamental challenge to EI. Even those who believe the critique is overstated or wrong in certain respects must admit it is intellectually robust, conceptually elegant, and logically compelling.

Kristjánsson even goes so far as to say that we would be better off jettisoning EI totally in favor of traditional Aristotelian virtue theory for purposes of moral education. On that point we disagree with him. We believe Kristjánsson may be too pessimistic about the potential of EI, a relatively new field of research that is, after all, an intellectual work in progress. A well designed collaboration between moral philosophers and psychologists might even offer the fascinating possibility down the road of scientific confirmation of certain aspects of Aristotle's moral position.

We reiterate our belief that an important aspect of the problem of EI's moral agnosticism is the fragmentation of knowledge within the modern university caused by overspecialization. As evidence, we refer to our correspondence with John Mayer, cited above, stating that psychologists don't consult with philosophers, and acknowledging that they should.

To conclude, we return to the BBC scenario described at the beginning of this paper. The scenario authors – Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee – characterized the second executive's performance as a model of EI because he broke the news effectively. They didn't say whether the layoff and related decisions were "good" ones in any moral sense. We were not given any information regarding the executive's goals and decisions. But clearly the situation confronted him with a moral choice. He could help the team feel good about themselves and get on with their careers. Or he could put himself in their shoes, consider their needs in terms of severance, health care, and outplacement, and address these concerns in the closing speech. In the past, management education has tended to focus on analytic decisions, like the layoff, and ignore how to deliver the news. The Primal Leadership approach focuses on *effective performance*, but ignores the difficult moral concerns.<sup>32</sup>

There is thus an opportunity for CBSs to pull it all together. How might Catholic virtue theory be brought to bear on the layoff decision and on related decisions?

### **III. How Catholic Virtues Can Strengthen the Emotional Competency Model**

"There is no nature so good that it cannot be perverted to evil by vicious habits; there is none so perverse that it cannot, first by God's grace and secondly, by our own labor and care, be brought under control and overcome."<sup>33</sup>

Catholic spirituality offers a compelling testament to the moral perfectibility of the human person through spiritual exercises. A young Francis de Sales wrote the above text over four hundred years ago. It appears in one of his letters providing spiritual direction to Mme. de Charmois. His letters to Mme. de Charmois were eventually published as St. Francis de Sales's Introduction to the Devout Life. Our point here is that Catholic spirituality, with its rich tradition (and track record) of spiritual direction, provides a wealth of materials that have helped

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<sup>32</sup> This analysis comes from our friend and colleague, Stewart A. Schoder, personal email, May 4, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 79.

believers for centuries to become better “persons for others.” For those who persevere, spiritual exercises will strengthen moral character.

The Catholic spiritual tradition has much to say about how we can become better persons for others – through a combination of our own labors and God’s grace – restraining emotions or using emotions as appropriate to accomplish the good. How might we integrate the insights and practices from Catholic spirituality into a managerial curriculum to help MBAs with their work-related emotional and moral challenges? The world of work brings us almost daily situations where we confront moral choices.

We believe that by cultivating virtue in a self-directed learning curriculum, managers can sharpen their abilities to act morally in emotionally charged situations. EI specialists have argued that emotions are cognitive, and that our experience of emotions, such as fear or joy, depends a lot on how we assess the situation. But, as we have argued, few psychologists have explored how ethics affects such emotional assessments.

Here we illustrate by example how Catholic virtue theory, for example, could help managers to improve their assessments of emotionally charged encounters. To support the illustration, we created a simple scheme, presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Emotional Competence Aligned with Virtues and Spiritual Exercises

Competence Defined	Potential Misuse	Corrective Virtues	Practical Exercises
Empathy: Sensing others’ feelings and perspective, and taking an active interest in their concerns.	Manipulation of others’ emotions to deceive.	Prudence, Temperance, Mercy.	Community experiences of living in mutual dependence, e.g., service learning based on the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

In this situation, a manager empathizes with an employee to resolve a problem. Empathy is the emotional competence defined above. Suppose your junior staffer failed to execute a project and her poor performance reflected badly on you and the company in the eyes of a major client. You have arranged a one-on-one debrief. How will you approach the problem and what solutions will you consider? Empathy will help you to draw out the employee, achieve clarity and see the situation reasonably. This approach will make you effective. Or you might take advantage of her openness to gather evidence that documents her inability to perform with the sole intention of firing her later. This approach makes you manipulative.

Suppose you listen with an open heart? You learned something about “listening” through the exercises associated with the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, which you began as a service learning experience at your business school and have continued since because of their effectiveness.<sup>34</sup> These experiences influence your “eyes of the heart” in this situation, and you

<sup>34</sup> We intend to devote a separate paper to what a service learning program based on the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy might look like in the context a Catholic business school. We note parenthetically that in theory such a program

regard your employee as someone you genuinely care about. Mercy influences your will to have compassion and to do something concrete for her. Temperance restrains your impatience and desire to complete the debrief as expeditiously as possible so that you can return to more pressing priorities. Listening calmly with an open heart, you hear something that makes you see what would make *her* effective. Perhaps it was reference to a family concern affecting her concentration, perhaps there was some other career that she had preferred, but didn't pursue. In any case, she wasn't happy at work. You suggest she speak about her goals with a colleague-mentor, and you further offer to arrange and attend a first meeting. Visibly relieved, she breaks into a smile, and so do you; energized, you both return to work.

Work is full of challenges posing moral choices – many more vexing than the one we described here. In such situations, we need to summon our consciences – quickly. We need to control our impulses so that we can see with an open heart. Prudence, Josef Pieper tells us, is much like a “situation conscience.” CBSs should provide instruction and service learning to help their MBAs cultivate this “situation conscience.” From Pieper we learn further about the component of prudence called “*solertia*,” which gives us “a ‘perfected ability,’ by virtue of which man, when confronted with a sudden event, does not close his eyes by reflex and then blindly, though perhaps boisterously, take random action. Rather with the aid of *solertia*, he can swiftly, but with open eyes and clear-sighted vision, decide for the good, avoiding the pitfalls of injustice, cowardice, and intemperance.”<sup>35</sup>

The Catholic spiritual tradition offers rich material for the creation of practical exercises aimed at cultivating these and other virtues. We believe such a service learning curriculum could be founded on the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. It might include such exercises as stints caring for the dying in hospices and visiting and counseling prisoners. The curriculum also needs to engage students in reflecting on Spiritual Works of Mercy.

## Conclusion

Emotions are complex; it seems unlikely that any discipline alone can devise a theory sufficient to explain the relation of emotion and behavior or why individuals differ in emotional competence. Psychologists, philosophers, management specialists, scientists, theologians, and others need to talk to each other.

We have outlined some of the concepts and theories, and pointed out where we see potential for strengthening the emotional competencies by aligning them with virtues and asserting that for an

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could foster the development of many different virtues. Consider humility. Humility has become an important subject for managers in the wake of Jim Collins now famous article “Level V Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve,” *Harvard Business Review*, January, 2001 (available from HBS Publishing as Item# R0507M). Collins’s research determined that humility was a consistent trait among CEOs who took their companies from mediocre performance to sustained excellence. But when an auditor asked him whether he thought humility was something that could be acquired or whether it was genetic, Collins pled ignorance. St. Francis de Sales, on the other hand, observed that meditating on one’s own death was a good way to cultivate humility. But it difficult to imagine contemporary MBA students with much patience for such an exercise. However, requiring an MBA student to spend some time caring for the terminally ill in a hospice as part of a service learning project may provide a powerful alternative vehicle for instilling humility. Caring for the ill offers us a unique opportunity to acquire certain virtues (see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Humans Need the Virtues* [Peru, IL: Carus Publishing Co., 1999], pp.119-145).

<sup>35</sup> Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), p. 16.

emotional competence to be a leadership competence, one needs moral virtues to direct behavior to the right ends. We believe the two-thousand year old treasury of Catholic spirituality and moral philosophy offers abundant material for the elaboration of a uniquely Catholic approach to contemporary leadership development that can add real value to the contemporary business school curriculum.