

**BRINGING EMOTION TO WORK: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE,  
EMPLOYEE RESISTANCE AND THE REINVENTION OF CHARACTER**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article centrally examines the sociological significance of emotional intelligence (EI) as a nascent managerial discourse. Through developing a three-way reading of the writers Richard Sennett, Daniel Goleman, and George Ritzer, it is contended that EI can be understood to signal ‘new rules’ for work involving demands for workers to develop moral character better attuned to the dynamics of the flexible workplace --- character which is more ‘intelligent’, adaptive, and reflexive. Furthermore, it is argued that while EI appears in some important respects to open the scope for worker discretion, it might also signal diminished scope for worker resistance. However, ultimately, the case of EI is used to problematise recent discussions of worker resistance --- to suggest the possibility of ‘resistant’ worker agency exercised through collusion with, as well as transgression of, corporate norms and practices. **Key words:** emotional intelligence; management control; moral character; resistance.

## **Introduction: Emotional Intelligence and The ‘New Rules’ for Work**

The rules for work are changing. We’re being judged by a new yardstick: not just how smart we are, or by our training or expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other. This yardstick is increasingly applied in choosing who will be hired and who will not, who will be let go and who retained, who passed over and who promoted (Goleman 1998: 3).

So begins Daniel Goleman’s *Working With Emotional Intelligence* (1998), the follow-up to his highly influential (1996) *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can Matter More than IQ*<sup>1</sup>. On the basis of these and other texts, and his associated work as a high-profile corporate consultant, Goleman has established himself as the leading authority on emotional intelligence (henceforth EI), which, as he defines it, consists of a set of core skills: namely, the intrapersonal competencies of *knowing one’s emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself*; and the interpersonal competencies of *recognising emotions in others* and *handling relationships* (1996: 42). Such skills, Goleman suggests, are largely neglected by our contemporary education systems and by corporate training programmes, and are not detected by conventional measures of ‘intelligence’ such as IQ, and yet, he suggests, they have come to be of fundamental importance both to personal and corporate success.

The concept of EI has gained a great deal of currency within both lay and academic discourse. While a somewhat crude indicator, it is noteworthy that at the time

of writing the internet-based book retailer, Amazon, lists over 2,500 titles devoted to the topic. In particular, EI has become a prominent theme in the literature on human resource management, training, and leadership (see, for example, the extensive reviews undertaken by Dulewicz & Higgs [2000; 2004]); and, indeed, EI has already begun to influence practices within these fields. A whole industry involved in the development of workplace assessment tools has rapidly adopted the concept. A range of existing measures of personality and aptitude have been amended, or repackaged, in attempts to incorporate some of the key principles involved in EI --- as a particularly telling example, the key practitioner journal *Competence* has recently been renamed *Competence and Emotional Intelligence*. In the UK we are told by the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* 14<sup>th</sup> May 1999 that EI is ‘reshaping business school research programmes’ (cited in Fineman 2004: 727); and by *The Guardian* that any potential candidate for a FE college headship should heed two words of advice ‘emotional intelligence’, since before long ‘...this buzz phrase will be inked on the blotters of every governors’ interview board in the sector’ (3<sup>rd</sup> October 2000: 46). Indeed, EI has found particularly fertile ground within the sphere of education: the Department for Education and Skills recently approved a pilot programme which involves children in 250 UK primary schools learning key emotional skills as a central part of the curriculum; within the higher education sector also we are asked to consider, for example, the prospect of *The Emotionally Intelligent Lecturer* (Mortiboys 2002).

Even by name, EI appears to mark a significant shift in attitudes towards emotion in the workplace --- from a late-80s corporate *zeitgeist* in which emotions were regarded as a barrier to ‘clear-headed’ decision-making and a deviation from ‘intelligence’

(Putnam and Mumby 1993), towards increasingly, an ethos in which the display, deployment and management of emotions --- *how well we handle ourselves and each other* --- has become emblematic of a new rationality and a new working skills 'toolkit'. With this very real influence on the assessment and recruitment industry, their direct interventions through consultancy work, and their authoritative appeal to the term 'intelligence', writers on EI are indeed doing more than just *signalling* how the rules for work are changing. But, as will be argued in this paper, such rules are not simply changing as a consequence of the discursive invention of EI. While Goleman views the rise of EI as resulting from recent scientific discovery (particularly the research on brain functioning undertaken by Le Doux (1986, 1992)), its ascendancy as a managerial discourse can also be understood to relate to a much broader set of shifts within the workplace --- shifts in the control strategies pursued by organisations, shifts in the character of work, shifts in the demands made of employees, and, indeed, shifts in the demands that employees make on their workplaces<sup>ii</sup>. Thus, this paper aims to locate EI not so much as a discreet set of ideas which in themselves are transforming the workplace, but rather, as an explicit template of the kinds of behavioural/emotional characteristics that have more generally come to be championed within particular sectors of the workplace, often without any direct reference to the specific rubric of EI<sup>iii</sup>.

Accordingly, this paper centrally considers a number of questions: firstly, how might we account for the ascendancy of EI as a managerial discourse?; secondly, what is the sociological significance of EI?; and thirdly, to what extent does the rise of EI signal (rather than wholesale constitute) important changes in specific sectors of the workplace? Until recently, the subject of EI has on the whole escaped critical sociological attention,

(notable exceptions are Fineman 2000, 2004; Cullinane & Pye 2001; Hughes 2003). The subject has largely been discussed within the psychological literature, where debates have centred on the concept's empirical validity (see, for example, Sternberg and Kaufman 1998; Davies *et al.* 1998; Schutte *et al.* 1998; Abraham 1999; Huy 1999); and over the measurement of EI or 'EQ' (Davies *et al.* 1998; Mayer *et al.* 1999; Ciarrochi *et al.* 2000; Ashkanasy *et al.* 2002). Thus, this paper explores the merits of considering the rise of EI sociologically; particularly in terms of what this investigation might reveal about particular sectors of the present-day workplace --- the demands made of employees, the 'new rules of work', and the extent to which EI embodies these. Consequently, the rise of EI as a managerial discourse is examined within the context of long-term changes within the workplace, and, ultimately, the case of EI is used to address some of the more prominent recent debates within critical organisational studies, particularly those which address issues of subjectivity and resistance in the labour process.

The discussion below begins with a commentary on the work of Richard Sennett, Daniel Goleman, and George Ritzer. This analysis is used as vehicle for the central line of argument: in short, that EI can be understood to constitute a 'reinvention' and a 'redefinition' of *character* in the sense that Sennett uses this term, but one which attends to the short-termism and moral ambiguity of the post-Fordist, flexible workplace, and one that stresses individual discretion in the place of dogged justification and predestination -- the Weberian 'iron cage'. Furthermore, it is suggested that under the guise of EI, character itself becomes 'enchanted': it comes to be understood as a commodity, a resource in which individuals and organisations can invest; it invites a neo-human relations customer service orientation to intra-organisational exchanges, such that even at

work we are compelled to operate simultaneously as consumers and producers. On the basis of this analysis it is proposed that EI appears, at least ostensibly, to mark a continuation of processes in which the control strategies pursued in contemporary work organisations have come increasingly to involve the colonisation (Casey 1995) of workers' affects and subjectivities (Hochschild 1983; Kunda 1992; Fineman 1993; Putnam & Mumby 1993; Grey 1996; Fineman & Sturdy 1997; Strangleman and Roberts 1999; Wilson 1999; Grugulis *et al.* 2000). As such, it would seem to offer at once greater worker discretion and a diminished scope for resistance. However, it is argued here that the case of EI also helps to problematise recent discussions of resistance and worker agency. The paper concludes by exploring the implications of a relational conceptualisation of resistance, and through drawing upon the example of EI, aims to illustrate how agency might be exercised through collusion with, as well as transgression of, corporate norms and practices.

The focus in much of the discussion below is on the kinds of organisations that have figured prominently in debates about workplace resistance in recent literature --- the 'culture managed' service corporation, the 'knowledge-intensive' enterprise, the 'customer-focused' firm, and so forth. As a central part of the discussion, Grugulis *et al.*'s (2000) discussion of 'Consultancy Co' is utilised as a testing ground for how the 'new rules of work' embodied in EI might be translated into practice. However, such organisations are by no means considered here as representative of the workplace as a whole, at best they constitute archetypes of the kinds of organisation in which the 'new rules' are most readily apparent. Indeed, at its current stage of development and articulation, the discourse of EI is likely to have much more significance for, for

example, the working life of a middle manager in a London-based consultancy firm, than say, a machine operator in a food processing plant.

### **Moral character and the changing ‘rules of work’**

In his highly penetrating (1998) text *The Corrosion of Character*, Richard Sennett explores how the era of the post-Fordist flexible workplace has promoted a shift in the outlook of employees. Within this context, he proposes, the arrangement of work promotes an emphasis on short-termism which corrodes trust, loyalty, and genuine commitment. Social bonds in the workplace become weaker as fleeting ties of association have greater utility to employees than more stable and permanent connections. He writes: ‘Time’s arrow is broken; it has no trajectory in a continually reengineered, routine-hating, short-term political economy. People feel the lack of human relations and durable purposes’ (98). Thus, within modern institutional networks we are compelled to develop more opportunistic, superficial, and furtive orientations to work. The servility of a previous generation embodied in the work ethic ‘be loyal to your company’, respect the boss, to surrender personal interests to those of the organisation, has been replaced by an ethic of knowing ‘how to handle yourself’. The rules of work increasingly include ‘knowing how to play the game’, ‘CV-building’, ‘knowing the right time to jump ships’, where ‘failure to move is taken as a sign of failure’ (1998: 87), and so forth. For Sennett, the net consequence of this shift is a corrosion of moral character.

Sennett contrasts the Weberian image of individual workers trapped in the ‘iron cage’ of rationality, seeking to gain power over themselves through endlessly toiling to



prove their moral virtue, with the ephemeral and superficial engagement characteristic of teamworking in the present-day workplace. He writes: 'Teamwork is the work ethic which suits a flexible political economy ... [it] is the group practice of demeaning superficiality' (1998: 99). In teamworking, Sennett argues, power struggles remain, but authority effectively disappears. Teamworking helps obscure domination: it creates the illusion that no one has responsibility, and thus those in control are able to act without needing to justify themselves or their acts. This power without responsibility he suggests, '...disorients employees; they may still feel driven to justify themselves, but now there is no one higher up who responds. Calvin's God has fled' (1998: 109). Put simply, Sennett is observing a long-term shift away from an ethic which emphasised long-termism, authority, dependence, obligation and predestination towards one which involves short-termism, an obfuscation of authority, an abhorrence of dependence, and the fiction that we are in control of our own destinies. When transposed to life beyond the workplace, particularly family life, Sennett argues, the dictum 'no long term' means, don't commit, don't make sacrifices; when practiced within the home '...teamwork is destructive, marking an absence of authority and of firm guidance in raising children' (1998: 25). The personal qualities of 'good work' no longer correspond to the qualities of 'good character' (1998: 21)

Sennett does not wish to convey a nostalgic sentimentalism for the worldly asceticism of the old work ethic; this involved its own heavy burdens --- as Weber did so much to demonstrate. Rather, his argument is that this previous work ethic encompassed aspects of *character*, such as trust and loyalty, that remain important today, and yet which do not find expression in the present-day workplace (1998: 99). Whilst flexibility

might constitute an answer to the tyranny of routine, in its place it leaves overwhelming uncertainty and disengagement. We are left with the inexorable flux of a workplace which offers employees, no longer involved in the pursuit of self-justification, little in the way of narrative --- with only precarious, insecure, fractured identities: with no coherent sense of self, and with profound moral uncertainty.

What's immediately striking about considering the work of Sennett in relation to that of Goleman is that these writers share remarkably similar concerns. As an archetypal example of 'Why [EI] matters now' (Goleman 1998: 9), Goleman recounts his discussions with employees of a Californian start-up company within the biotechnology industry who felt '...burned out and robbed of their private lives. And though everyone could talk via computer to everyone else, people felt that no one was truly listening to them. *People desperately felt the need for connection, for empathy, for open communication*' (1998: 9 *my emphasis*). Goleman's statements here are strongly reminiscent of Sennett's earlier-cited concern that 'people feel the lack of human relations and durable purpose'. But where Sennett views this condition as the inevitable consequence of an oppressive social order characterised by flexibility and flux, Goleman views it as a defining concern for *both* labour and capital in the present-day business environment. He continues:

In the new stripped-down, every-job-counts business climate, these human realities will matter more than ever. Massive change is a constant; technical innovations, global competition, and the pressures of institutional investors are ever-escalating forces for flux ... As business changes, so do the traits needed to

excel. Data tracking the talents of star performers over several decades reveal that two abilities that mattered relatively little for success in the 1970s have become crucially important in the 1990s: team building and adapting to change (1998: 9--10).

Herein lies the most important distinction between the two authors. Where Sennett understands team-building and adapting to change as *root causes* of the corrosion of moral character, Goleman views these as fundamentally important *talents* and *abilities* crucial to success --- *as skills to be developed*; the stuff of ‘star performers’ at work. Where Sennett expounds the disastrous consequences of transposing to our family lives the endeavours of team-building and adapting to change, Goleman would suggest that our capacity to handle such endeavours matters fundamentally to ‘success’ in all arenas of life, as much at home as at work. Goleman views our capacities for team-building and adapting to change as ultimately dependent upon the inter- and intra-personal competencies that exhibit an individual’s EI.

Thus for Goleman, changes leading to the present-day organisation of work have not instrumented a corrosion of character, rather, they have *intensified* demands for ‘character’. It is worth once again quoting Goleman directly in this connection:

There is an old-fashioned word for the body of skills that emotional intelligence represents: *character*... The bedrock of character is self-discipline; the virtuous life, as philosophers since Aristotle have observed, is based on self-control. A related keystone of character is being able to motivate and guide

oneself, whether in doing homework, finishing a job, or getting up in the morning. And, as we have seen, the ability to defer gratification and to control and channel one's urges to act is a basic emotional skill, one that in a former day was called will (Goleman 1998: 285).

If one were to read this passage from Goleman's text in isolation, it would seem that he and Sennett share a common understanding of 'character' --- as involving self-denial, deferring gratification, discipline. But as one reads on, it becomes apparent that under the guise of EI, Goleman is offering a new *version* of character. For example, rather than simply advocating a return to the asceticism of old, Goleman is careful to point out the dangers of 'overcontrol' (1998: 81). Indeed, a key aspect of the 'competence' of emotional self-control resides in an individual knowing when to exercise control, in calculating the right degree of control, and in knowing how to express self-control 'appropriately'.

So in this sense, EI constitutes a reinvention of character such that it is better aligned to a new organisation of work: character which encompasses a broad range of skills to be developed as a lifetime project, but character which, by definition, is 'flexible', 'adaptable', open to individual nuance and to the ever-present change of the global market place<sup>iv</sup>. Moreover, EI perfectly accommodates the shunning of dependence that Sennett identifies: it embodies the meritocratic ideal that we are in control of our own destinies at work and beyond. Goleman states, for example, that IQ might, at best, contribute: '...about 20 percent to the factors that determine life success, which leaves 80 percent to other forces' (1996: 34), implying that other individual attributes --- including,

of course, our EI --- will account for the other 80%. Neither here nor later in Goleman's work is there any consideration of how structural inequalities might determine success in life. Indeed, drawing upon Goleman's much-cited statistic, some subsequent authors take the short conceptual step of proposing that EI itself accounts for 80% of success at work, at school, or in personal relationships (see, for example, Pool 1997).

### **EI as the Enchantment of Character**

As Yiannis Gabriel (2001) has observed, given Sennett's acutely pessimistic reading of the flexible workplace, it is surprising that the societies in which this form of work organisation is dominant, particularly North America, have not thus far collapsed. Gabriel suggests that the work of George Ritzer might help provide an explanation in this connection. In *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, Ritzer develops the thesis that *consumption* has come to be an increasingly important source of identity, meaning and fulfilment. His thesis is that a process of 're-enchantment' (later writers, particularly Bryman [1995; 1999; 2004] have developed the complementary notion of 'Disneyization') has been extended to more and more arenas of social life, such that even the most abstemious and utilitarian institutions become transformed into 'cathedrals of consumption'. Thus, following Gabriel's complementary analysis of the work of Ritzer and Sennett, it can be understood that through a process of 're-enchantment' present-day managers help fill the vacuum of identity, meaning and achievement that arises from the discontents of the present-day flexible workplace. As such, modern institutional networks

become oriented more towards the ‘fantasising consumer’ than the ‘toiling worker’ (Gabriel 2001: 4).

Processes of re-enchantment involve a proliferation of the means by which almost every human experience comes to involve opportunities for consumption: through architectural configurations; hyperbolic image and sign; festival and spectacle. Both the ‘private’ and ‘public’ domains of social life become replete with openings into the seductive fantasy world of commercial extravaganza. Such developments, Ritzer suggests, are indicative of an ‘implosion’ of the boundaries between previously more separate entities --- spheres of social life, institutions, arenas of consumption, and so forth. For example, the boundaries between shopping and fun; purchasing and gambling; touring and consuming; educational settings and shopping malls; all become de-differentiated in relation to processes of re-enchantment.

In fact, one could extend Ritzer’s arguments to an even more fundamental level; such that the rise of EI might be understood as part of a more general implosion of the means of consumption and the means of production. Taken as an intellectual development within the managerial literature, EI can be understood as part of a broader neo-human relations movement which focuses attention on the emotional conditions of labour: how we feel at work; the extent to which our work is pleasurable and entertaining --- a focus on *how well we handle each other*. When applied in practice, such ideas invite an ‘emotional customer-service’ orientation to intra-organisational exchanges whereby employees are increasingly compelled to act simultaneously as ‘consumers’ and ‘producers’ (Gabriel & Lang 1995; Du Gay 1996; Rosenthal *et al.* 1997; Sturdy 1998).

Consider, for example, the following quotation in which the management theorist Mike Bagshaw speculates on what implications EI might have for the future of work:

The future role of the management trainer may not just be to codify and disseminate knowledge effectively but also to entertain ... [T]he manager's role becomes one of human psychologist and facilitator where he/she guides people to find their own learning and sense of purpose... [the manager would] ensure the knowledge is gained in an entertaining way that harmonises any conflict between an individual's and the organisation's goals. Training companies, consultants and business schools may be forced to compete on how pleasurable, innovative and entertaining their teaching methods are... (Bagshaw 2000: 181--2).

Bagshaw's arguments here, particularly those concerning training consultants and business schools, may point towards more than just a speculative future. Indeed, they directly echo Ritzer's concerns about the advent of 'shopping mall high schools' which, he suggests, need to be 'fun' in order to attract their student-consumers, and, like malls, are: '...places to meet friends, pass the time, get out of the rain, or watch the promenade. Shopping malls or their high school equivalents can be *entertaining* places to onlookers with no intention of buying anything' (1999: 142 *original emphasis*). In as far as this reading is correct, we can understand the reinvention of character as also involving the enchantment of character. Under the guise of EI, 'character' becomes a deployable human resource, one which is consumed and developed: our intra-organisational 'clients' are encouraged to 'enjoy the show' put on by the training department; the core enterprise

of management becomes the service of group harmony and increasingly encompasses the role of identity consultant.

So EI involves a number of facets: it involves the re-invention, the redefinition, the enchantment, of 'character', whilst simultaneously attending to the short-termist reality of the post-Fordist workplace. It classifies as 'intelligent', and morally speaking, 'good', knowing how to handle oneself and others --- knowing when to move jobs, and so forth; whilst commodifying aspects of 'character', particularly those which relate to self-discipline/the management of affect, and stylistically redefining these as competencies/resources which should be deployed *at the right times*. Character is therefore no longer understood simply as an ethical domain, a domain of moral worth; it is not so much about adhering to rigid and absolute principles, it resides in individual discretion --- the how and when of our actions, their appropriateness to any particular context within the flow of social life.

### **EI and the Colonisation of Affect**

Thus locating the rise of EI as a managerial discourse within some of the processes identified by Sennett and Ritzer also serves here to highlight how EI might be linked to changes in the control strategies pursued in organisations. EI can be understood as intrinsically related to a broader, well-documented, trend involving the increasing corporate 'colonisation' (Casey 1995) of worker subjectivity and affect through the adoption of normative control strategies (Hochschild 1983; Kunda 1992; Fineman 1993; Putnam & Mumby 1993; Grey 1996; Fineman & Sturdy 1997; Strangleman and Roberts



1999; Wilson 1999; Grugulis *et al.* 2000). Even in the absence of any explicit appeal to the concept of EI, demands for the individually-nuanced presentation and management of affect, knowing how to handle oneself, have been shown to figure prominently in such control systems. Grugulis *et al.*'s (2000) analysis of ConsultancyCo is a particularly useful illustration in this connection.

Grugulis *et al.* explore how, as ConsultancyCo underwent rapid expansion, management aimed to institutionalise the simple, personal control of the founding owner through culture management techniques which included a range of practices: weekend outings (with invites extended to employees' families); sports contests; mufti days; a range of activities involving fancy dress; discos; and so on (2000: 102). They suggest that participation in such 'socials' was only notionally voluntary: '...employees were expected to *want* to participate and to actively enjoy themselves when they did' (2000: 103). Such events, often held outside of 'office hours' effectively blurred, or to use Ritzer's language, imploded, the distinction not just between work time and non-work time, but work activities and non-work activities --- between work and leisure (2000: 104).

First on the list of principles/directives that make up ConsultancyCo's 'culture statement' is the sentence: 'Have fun and enjoy work' (2000: 104). The list also includes 'Always put the client first; make quality a part of everything we do; share knowledge with others; work as a team; develop your full potential; make decisions; take ownership and resolve problems; learn from mistakes without fear' (2000: 104). It would seem that Bagshaw's vision of the enchanted, EI, 'entertaining office' of the future has already

been realised. Indeed, in ConsultancyCo we can find examples of very real ‘Disneyization’:

[ConsultancyCo’s] directors were clear about the type of behaviours required and enterprising in their efforts at seeking them out. Every year the company’s graduate open day was planned to coincide with Red Nose Day with the result that interested undergraduates arrived to find most of the office in fancy dress. Life sized versions of Mickey Mouse, bunny girls and teddy bears ran round the office, playing pranks and waving collection buckets at their colleagues, while interviews would be conducted with the interviewers still in costume (2000: 106).

For employees at ConsultancyCo, the rules of work involved implicitly understanding ‘the ‘people’ way of doing things’ (2000: 111) --- knowing how to handle yourself and others was implicitly written into the employment contract. As the above quotation also helps to demonstrate, the recruitment team at ConsultancyCo actively sought out gregarious and energetic individuals who would be comfortable with participating in the organisation’s characteristic, highly-‘social’, agenda.

Operating within Goleman’s framework of EI, such ‘desirable’ characteristics could easily be conceptually translated into those which are ‘intelligent’. Indeed, Goleman’s model of the emotionally intelligent male ‘pure type’, for example, refers to individuals who are ‘...socially poised, outgoing and cheerful, not prone to fearfulness or worried rumination. They have a notable capacity for commitment to people or causes.

Their emotional life is rich, but appropriate; they are comfortable with themselves, others, and the social universe they live in' (1996: 45).

Other examples of the practice of 'organisational fit' (Kanter 1977) can be found, for example, in the work of Grey (1994, 1998); Nickson *et al.* (2001); and indeed, in the literature on emotional labour, including the classic work of Hochschild (1983). Robertson and Swan (2003: 845--6) recount the case of 'Universal' where, once again without any direct reference to notions of EI, prospective employees needed to demonstrate at interview '...not only their expertise but importantly their individuality and strength of *character*' (2003: 846 *emphasis added*). These authors found it difficult to elucidate the 'particular type' that typified a consultant at Universal since dress codes, behaviours, and values varied significantly; nonetheless, successful candidates, like those at ConsultancyCo, had exhibited the characteristics which meant they were deemed to be 'one of us' (2003: 846).

In this sense EI can be understood as an exemplar of a more general trend in which the rules of work involve implicit demands upon, and expectations of, emotional and moral character: on the one hand the rules are that *there are no rules*, 'just relax', 'be yourself'; but the absence of any *explicit* rules open up the possibilities for different kinds of control: employees are compelled to 'fit in', *be* 'one of us', and to do so in a manner which is 'appropriate', 'intelligent'.

## **EI, Resistance and Employee Subjectivity**

Grugulis *et al.* are keen to point out that the employees of ConsultancyCo were not ‘cultural dopes’. Senior management could not simply furnish the corporate culture with whichever values, emotions and behavioural characteristics it desired (Anthony 1994; Grugulis *et al.* 2000: 98). There was, indeed, very real and tangible evidence of goodwill, a pleasant informality that was not merely rhetorical (2000: 98; 108). Employees were, on the whole, willing participants in ConsultancyCo’s social agenda. However, in part, this might be explained by ConsultancyCo’s rigorous recruitment and selection policy. Furthermore, while the culture management techniques exemplified in the case of ConsultancyCo may appear to be in many ways similar to earlier corporate attempts to steer the moral character of employees (such as those observed in Ford by Beynon [1973]), they differ from such attempts in their emphasis on ‘workplace participation to the exclusion of all else’ (2000: 99). Consequently, Grugulis *et al.* propose, it becomes more difficult for employees to sustain boundaries between home and work as managerial control is increasingly extended to encompass the totality of employees’ lives (2000: 112). In this way, ConsultancyCo combines a substantial degree of discretion over work with increased regulation, particularly in the colonisation of employees’ ‘private’ activities (2000: 99, 100). Similarly, in the case of Universal, role ambiguity and autonomy over work loads on the one hand, was ultimately set against an elaborate, and seemingly anomalous, performance management system on the other (Robertson and Swan 2003: 843; *see also* Scarbrough 1999; Lowendahl 1997).

Employees at ConsultancyCo and Universal were compelled to live their emotional lives at work (Hughes 2003). Their identities, self-narratives, sources of meaning, were inextricably connected with their employment. Such present-day

techniques of ‘character formation’ (Grugulis *et al.* 2000: 99) through culture management might, therefore, involve the risk that employees are unable to develop identities separate from the workplace. Indeed, such concerns have been expressed directly regarding the institutional practice of EI. For example, Cullinane and Pye (2001) argue that EI involves a set of competencies that are understood to be expressive of an employee’s total identity, such that attempts to maintain a sense of self separate from the organisationally-imposed normative identity --- attempts to develop protective outer-countenances, self-distancing strategies, and so forth --- carry the risk of appearing emotionally ‘unintelligent’, ‘incompetent, immature, misguided, stunted or even suffering from some form of personality disorder or neurosis’ (2001: 10) <sup>v</sup>.

When understood as part of a more general shift in the control strategies employed by organisations, the rise of EI may thus signal a further move towards more totalizing regimes of organisational domination in which employee identity becomes effectively subsumed within the workplace and opportunities for resistance are greatly limited. Such an interpretation would, indeed, find support in a well-established body of sociological literature (for example, Ray 1986; Du Gay 1991, 1993; Deetz 1992; Kunda 1992; Barley & Kunda 1992; Barker 1993, 1999; Willmott 1993; Casey 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999). However, more recently, particularly since Thompson and Ackroyd’s (1995) article, there has been somewhat of a resurgence of interest in exploring opportunities for resistance against such controls (Fleming and Sewell 2002); partly through redefining resistance, and through looking for its new sites, forms and modalities (for example, Jermier *et al.* 1994; Edwards *et al.* 1995; Gabriel 1999, 2001; Knights and

McCabe 2000; Sturdy and Fineman 2001; Fleming and Sewell 2002; Fleming and Spicer 2003).

Fleming and Sewell's work is a particularly interesting case in point. These authors introduce the concept of 'Svejkism' a term derived from the leading character of Jaroslav Hasek's (1973) novel, *The Good Solider, Svejk*, to refer to new modalities of resistance which can emerge even within regimes of enculturation as discussed above. Fleming and Sewell first explore how traditional forms of resistance such as go-slows, working to rule, and union action more generally, have become less viable in relation to the ideological incorporation that has accompanied the shift towards the use of normative control strategies within organisations. Where traditional forms of corporate control involved a degree of mutual understanding between employees *and* employers along the lines of 'OK, so we pay our workers a low wage but, in return, we turn a blind eye to petty pilfering and gold-bricking, up to a point' (Fleming & Sewell 2002: 860, here paraphrasing Mars 1982), under controls via commitment more than simple compliance, such accommodation becomes less possible. They write, 'One may expect exclamations such as: 'Strike? Why do you want to strike? We're all in this together. We're all friends now. We're part of a *family!*' (2002: 860--861). Moreover, Fleming and Sewell suggest, any form of dissent against the inequality of capitalist labour process is likely to be pathologised as an individual failing: "'Are you stressed?' 'Do you have financial problems?' 'Do you suffer from anorexia?' Thus, the question is invariably framed in the same way: 'What's wrong with *you?*'" (2002: 861). Here Fleming and Sewell's arguments lend support to those of Cullinane and Pye (discussed earlier). Indeed, EI would seem to extend the possibility for the pathologisation of resistance and opposition.

With its purported natural and social scientific underpinnings, EI makes claims to a scientific legitimacy and authority which may be harder to resist, harder to dismiss as mere ‘managerial rhetoric’ (Hughes 2003; Fineman 2004).

Nonetheless, Fleming and Sewell propose, rather than marking an end to all possibilities for dissent and transgression, normative organisational control strategies shift the *sites* of resistance such that they include the ‘contested terrain’ (Edwards 1979) of employee subjectivity itself (Fleming and Sewell 2002: 863). Even in the absence of an explicit ‘class consciousness’, employees might pursue a range of strategies of ‘scrimshanking’ and ‘flannelling’. Such activities might include an employee’s apparently wholehearted participation in, or affirmation of, organisational acts of ‘routinised enchantment’ (Bailey 1993 in Fleming & Sewell 2002: 868). A Svejik might seemingly embrace organisational initiatives aimed at enhancing quality and service with such ostensible zeal --- for example, cramming the suggestion box full of not completely useless offerings --- that management may be forced to question the wisdom of such measures themselves (2002: 868). Similarly, a Svejik might adopt an *ironical disposition*, whereby, through the feigning of ignorance, she or he may seek to expose the shortcomings and banality of a managerial argument (2002: 868).

We might also envisage such modes of resistance being employed in relation to the institutional practice of EI. Below, for example, Goleman describes the process by which, through building on the competency of *emotional self awareness*, consultants working within the Lincoln motor company instituted a programme of ‘unlearning defensive habits of conversation’ (1998: 292):

The method is simple: Instead of arguing, the parties agree to mutually explore the assumptions that undergird their points of view. A classic example of how people jump to conclusions is when you see someone yawn in a meeting, leap to the assumption that he is bored, and then skip to the more damaging overgeneralization that he doesn't care about the meeting, anyone else's thoughts, or the entire project... Once these hidden assumptions surface, they can be tested against reality by talking about them. For instance, we may discover the yawn was not from boredom but rather exhaustion due to getting up in the night with a cranky infant (1998: 292--3).

On first sight, such a practice would appear to constitute an extension of managerial surveillance and control to the level of personal feeling, and a further dissolution of the boundaries between 'private' and 'working' life. But equally, such a practice opens up the possibilities for exposing tensions, cracks, and disharmony in the 'organisational family' --- albeit in the service of the emotional honesty that has been solicited. Through the practice of emotionally intelligent 'flannelling' (Fleming and Sewell 2002), employees would be presented with the opportunity to 'start a fire' of corporate infighting, to expose managerial failings, and to otherwise express dissent through wholehearted participation in the culture management programme. And herein lies a significant point: in opening the doors to emotional honesty, such emotionally intelligent workplaces may actually enhance the scope for new forms of resistance. As Gabriel (2001) has argued, we may need to rethink our guiding metaphor in relation to the present-day context of organisational controls. The iron cage of rationality, he



suggests, has increasingly been replaced with a ‘glass cage’ of total *exposure* (of our behaviour, our values, indeed, our emotions): to the gaze of management, consumers, fellow employees. That the cage is glass draws upon Foucault’s image of the Panopticon --- it invokes an acknowledgement of the bewildering array of surveillance techniques and technologies deployed by modern management --- but the reference to glass also serves to highlight the fragility of normative control systems. As Gabriel suggests, the bondage of continuous exposure, paradoxically, greatly enhances our capacities to subvert and disrupt organisational practice. We are presented with opportunities to show up our ‘corporate parents’, he writes: ‘...a video camera surreptitiously smuggled into a sweat-shop can shatter a company’s image and undo the work of millions of dollars of advertising, a leaked internal memo can virtually demolish a corporate colossus, and a small band of environmental activists acting tactically in front of television cameras can bring a multinational to its feet’ (2001: 10). Indeed, Grugulis *et al.* cite the example of an employee who used the launch of a client’s web page as an opportunity to attack publicly both ConsultancyCo and the client corporation itself (2000: 110). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the employee was dismissed.

### **Rethinking Resistance: The Case of EI**

As this example from Grugulis *et al.* also serves to demonstrate, while the scope for employee resistance and opposition might be considerably enhanced by the advent of the ‘glass cage’, such acts of sabotage are likely to be severely sanctioned. Where Fleming and Sewell’s work is of particular value is in highlighting forms of resistance which are

positioned in such a way that they escape detection, or provide management with no legitimate comeback. Following Kondo (1990) and Edwards *et al.* (1995) among others, Fleming and Sewell are careful to avoid confining their definition of resistance only to conscious, heroic, formal, organised acts (2002: 862). They quite rightly wish to avoid employing a transcendental arbiter by which to distinguish ‘legitimate’ or ‘real’ acts of resistance from ‘false’ ones. This, in part, stems from an attempt to understand acts of resistance which do not stem directly from overt class struggle (2002: 863). Indeed, it would be problematic to limit understandings of resistance solely to conscious acts of opposition to capitalist authority. And equally, it is problematic to view resistance as residing solely in the sphere of work.

Resistance is not a zero-sum ‘object’, not a ‘thing’ as such, it is an aspect of power relationships, and not just those between employees and employers: it may also be found in the relationships between spouses; between teachers and students; between parents and children. Even within the workplace itself, we may also encounter resistance against domination from fellow employees --- horizontal resistance --- as well as resistance of managerial domination. Indeed, managers themselves can also assume a subject position in relation to capital, and as such, be submitted to enculturation and surveillance (Watson 1994; Parker 1995; Du Gay 1996; Gabriel 1999). Moreover, resistance might not be the only source of employee agency. Following the work of Edwards *et al.* (1995) Fleming and Sewell (2002), focus exclusively on how through *transgression*, albeit exercised through a seeming compliance with corporate norms, employees are able to find any scope for agency. However, as the case of EI suggests, agency may be exercised even in a genuine, uncynical collusion with corporate practice.

EI might be deployed to draw attention to an employee's negative emotional experiences at work, the extent to which an employee is, say bullied by a peer, is unhappy, or neglected. As Fineman suggests, EI potentially '... challenges the dominant model of rationality in organizational effectiveness and, in doing so, exposes some of the traditional organizational oppressions which have emotional underpinnings and consequences --- such as sexism, harassment, lack of compassion, prejudice and exploitation' (2000: 112). In doing so, EI highlights a new form of rationality --- emotions cannot be unchecked, they are new informants of our world, new ways of looking, new skills for the maintenance of self/other control. While the scope for such philanthropical utility might be substantially restricted by, ultimately, the use of EI in relation to a productivity agenda, it nonetheless serves to highlight the possibilities for employee agency through means other than transgression. In this sense, the institutional practice of EI has the potential to allow for the legitimate expression of emotionally-constituted, resistant *feelings* of workers, which themselves may arise from the very normative control system of which EI forms an integral part. Rather than 'interruptions to the flow of work' (Sturdy and Fineman 2001: 137), such feelings might thus be expressed as an integral *part* of work.

On being invited to bring their emotions to work, employees thus might become more vulnerable, potentially more normatively incorporated, more open to emotional surveillance, but also potentially more able to exercise agency through subscribing to the very same managerial rationality to which they are subject. That is to say, in the name of 'how I feel at work', 'how I am treated by others' I am also able to make my own emotional demands on the workplace. And while my acts of resistance, or my lack of

involvement or participation might be pathologised as a personal failing, an incompetence, or worse, some psychological disorder, so also might be my 'manager's.

Moreover, again returning to the arguments of Sennett, the organisational practice of teamworking can lead to a proliferation of de-layered roles, such that 'real' authority becomes obscured: the title 'manager' itself may no longer be an unequivocal or reliable indicator of positioning within an organisational control--command structure. And even such structures themselves are not unambiguous. Modern institutional networks of the type to which Sennett refers involve highly complex chains of authority, or perhaps better, power balances, tensions, and struggles, which run both hierarchically and horizontally, not simply as part of structural designs to obfuscate authority, but as commercial responses to global market changes. The equation that enculturation, or normative control, is something that 'managers do to employees', and something that 'employees resist against' is in this sense problematic. While Sennett might be right to suggest that teamworking leads to a position whereby managers, perhaps we might say 'real' managers (though it would be problematic to do so), have power without responsibility, teamworking equally involves a profusion of management roles which involve *responsibility with relatively little 'power'*. Paradoxically, under the very managerial rhetoric of EI, a decline in organisational productivity might be construed as an individual failing --- as residing in the personal deficiencies as a 'people person' of even the most 'senior' of 'managers'. The question remains however, of whether in their potential sanctioning of the emotional display of fear, anxiety, frustration, anger, and so forth --- and in proscribing modes of emotional expression deemed as organisationally 'appropriate' --- EI-based control systems might effectively subsume resistant worker

agency such that it is performative, but rarely transformative. To paraphrase Grugulis *et al.* (2000: 113) the institutional practice of EI is liable neither to release employees from alienating regulations, nor invariably deny employees any scope for agency --- it might offer simultaneously greater freedoms in some respects, and greater tendencies towards domination in others.

Thus, this is definitely not to suggest that ‘the new rules of work’ enshrined explicitly in the discourse of EI might herald the demise of power inequalities and industrial conflict within the workplace. The extent to which EI might in practice be harnessed to serve the interests of both labour and capital remains to be seen. And it is this connection that Sennett’s portrayal of the contemporary workplace might be misleading. Sennett is somewhat equivocal on the persistence of industrial conflict within the workplaces he describes, and ultimately his arguments appear to rest upon unitarist assumptions. For example, his conclusion that the ills of the modern capitalist workplace can only be addressed through mutual identification appears to be premised upon the notion that employers and labour can ultimately work as ‘partners, not rivals’ (Charles 1973: 263; Fox 1974: 256). Indeed, while authority might be obscured within the modern capitalist workplaces Sennett describes (and which have been the focus of this paper) conflict and inequality nonetheless remain<sup>vi</sup>. Accordingly, some employees or managers will inevitably have considerably more access to power resources than others and will thus be better positioned to arbitrate between what behaviours, displays, attributes, and so forth are understood to be emotionally ‘intelligent’ or ‘unintelligent’. Similarly, there remains a role for organised labour in the EI workplace: Sturdy and Fineman (2001) illustrate, for example, how in the US and the UK, trade unions have endeavoured to

expose the ‘managerial causes’ of worker stress, and the moral tendency of management to mask these by blaming individual employees for their emotional mismanagement (2001: 147)--- or, by analytic extension here, for their lack of ‘emotional intelligence’.

Furthermore, from reading Sennett one gets the impression that the disenchanted flexible workplace is ubiquitous, from Ritzer that re-enchantment is endemic, and from Gabriel that ‘glass cages’ have all but replaced iron cages. As suggested in the introduction to this paper, however, such trends are considerably more pervasive in some industrial sectors and some organisational forms than in others. There remains considerable debate as to the degree to which the flexible, normatively-controlled workplace is widespread, and indeed whether such controls are actually replacing, or emerging as complimentary to, their bureaucratic counterparts (see, for example, Van Maanen and Kunda 1989; Kärreman and Alvesson 2004). Even within the workplaces described in this paper, EI is likely to have considerably more significance for some employees than for others: Goleman himself recognises that EI-based competencies matter most for those employees at the apex of organisations, whereas IQ and technical skills are more important determinants of success at lower levels of the corporate hierarchy (Goleman *et al.* 2002: 250).

## **Conclusion**

In many ways, EI ostensibly looks to be ‘old wine in new bottles’ (Woodruffe 2000: 29); it echoes the rhetoric of managerial fads such as sensitivity training groups (T-groups), encounter groups, transactional analysis, corporate culture, and so forth. Indeed, Goleman

himself would be the first to recognise that the EI competencies he identifies have in fact been known and used for at least two decades (Goleman 2001: 51). Goleman stylistically positions EI not so much as a solution, but as an explanation, ‘a fresh way to understand’ the traits that matter most (2001: 51). The real newness of EI resides in its ‘rhetorical force’ (Fineman 2000: 112), its authority, its scientific weight. The use of the term ‘intelligence’ itself implies an arbiter which is not negotiated --- a standard not just of performance at work but of a person in the totality, a measure based on ‘science’ not on corporate policy. This authority, it has been argued, may make EI as a system of normative controls significantly harder to resist, and yet, simultaneously, EI may open up new possibilities for resistant worker agency since, it has been suggested, EI at once combines greater emotional regulation with greater discretion over the display and management of emotions<sup>vii</sup>.

This paper has argued that the sociological significance of EI resides not simply in the concept itself, and in its specific applications, but also in the broader processes that it exemplifies. A parallel can be drawn here with Bryman’s (1999; 2004) distinction between Disneyfication (as both the spread of the Disney brand itself and the homogenisation of products produced under the Disney label) and Disneyization (as the spread of the principles and practices exemplified by Disney). In the present discussion, EI has been considered as both a specific managerial discourse and as an exemplar of ‘new rules of work’, rules which involve a range of processes reaching far beyond the specific ideas related to EI. Such processes include (1) the ‘coming out’ (Fineman 2000: 107; Hughes 2003) of emotions on an unprecedented scale within the workplace; (2) the resurrection of the idea that ‘good work’ equates to ‘good moral character’, partly

through a redefinition of character such that it attuned to the transient indefinite flux of a flexible workplace; and in relation to this, (3) the emergence of the idea that the new rules of work involve the notion that *there are no rules*, there is just ‘appropriateness’, ‘intelligence’, ‘discretion’; but this apparent absence of rules is in fact premised upon a proliferation of implicit norms and behavioural mores embodied in elaborate culture management systems.

This paper has suggested that the case of EI serves to highlight the dialectical tensions inherent in normative control systems: between, on the one hand, the ceding of certain constraints and, simultaneously, on the other, the expansion of new forms of control. Using the case of EI as an illustration, the paper has raised the possibility of resistant employee agency exercised within such control contexts through an uncynical collusion with managerial discourse, and of resistance itself as relational and multifaceted: as a simultaneously emotional, political, and rational phenomenon. Indeed, under the specific discourse of EI the emotional itself is rendered rational, emotions are deemed to matter not because it is morally or ethically right to consider them, but because they are what determine personal and corporate success. How well we are handled at work, even by our managers, becomes a matter of productivity not philanthropy, of managerial competence, not simply of corporate policy. However, equally it has been argued, in effectively authorising the expression of resistant worker feelings, EI presents the scope to subsume these within the very control system in response to which such feelings might be generated. Ultimately, the issues raised in this paper beg for empirical research into how the ‘rules of work’ exemplified in the discourse of EI are actually enacted, received, negotiated, deployed, and re-colonised within different kinds of



workplaces and by different parties; indeed, a core aim of this paper has been to establish this as a problem for further sociological investigation.

Finally, it has been argued that EI points towards an increasing focus upon specific kinds of emotional display and management as criteria for selection, recruitment, development, and promotion. The case of EI thus lends support to the idea that regimes of emotional control are becoming increasingly institutionalised and sophisticated (Sturdy and Fineman 2001: 135). However, beyond this, it has been suggested that the ‘new rules’ embedded in EI can also be understood as indicative of a response to the moral vacuity of the post-Fordist workplace: as embodying a reinvention of ‘character’ as reflexive, ‘intelligent’ and as residing within the realm of individual discretion.

Character, under this new guise, resides not so much in the adherence to absolute moral principles, but in an individual’s *performance* in responding to the flow of working life. As such EI might be viewed as an archetype of how ‘character’ is being *transformed*, ‘enchanted’, rather than *corroded*, within some, but by no means all, sectors of the contemporary workplace.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> This paper focuses on the work of Daniel Goleman because it constitutes the ‘version’ of emotional intelligence that is most likely to be received and applied by practitioners in the workplace. Goleman is by far the most popular and influential writer on the topic, but there is substantial critique of his work from others in the academic community, particularly regarding his claims concerning EI’s predictive value and its fixity/capacity to be developed (see, for example, Mayer *et al.* 2000; Mayer & Cobb 2000; Hein 2003). There is considerable debate over the very ‘competencies’ that could be said to constitute emotional intelligence (Davies *et al.* 1998; Mayer *et al.* 1999; Ciarrochi *et al.* 2000; Ashkanasy *et al.* 2002); and over measuring these (Davies *et al.* 1998; Ashkanasy *et al.* 2002). Indeed, there is extensive debate concerning the conceptual validity of EI more generally (see, for example, Sternberg and Kaufman 1998; Davies *et al.* 1998; Schutte *et al.* 1998; Abraham 1999; Huy 1999; Sternberg 2001).

<sup>ii</sup> Elsewhere (Hughes 2003) I have explored the extent to which EI can be understood to constitute a proliferation of demands for *emotional labour* (Hochschild 1979; 1983), and considered the rise of EI in relation to processes of informalisation (Wouters 1977; 1986) and civilisation (Elias 2000). Here I wish to consider other analytical possibilities and attend to a different, though complimentary, set of concerns.

<sup>iii</sup> This is not to suggest that, by contrast, Goleman views the ‘new rules of work’ as arising solely from the impact of EI research. For example, in *The New Leaders* (Goleman *et al.* 2002), Goleman and his colleagues describe research into nearly 500 existing competence models from companies such as IBM, Lucent, PepsiCo, and British

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Airways which revealed that (what he would recognise as) EI-based competencies consistently ‘emerged as the reason for [the] effectiveness’ of ‘star performers’ (2002: 250). In other words, Goleman and his colleagues are suggesting that, according to this research, many large corporations have already ‘realised for themselves’ the importance of emotional competencies, independent of any intervention from the EI consultancy industry.

<sup>iv</sup> As has been argued elsewhere (Hughes 2003), this apparent ‘relaxation’ of social sanctions on behaviour --- the emphasis of EI on individual discretion over the ‘playful’ and ‘flexible’ deployment and expression of emotions --- does not, in fact, constitute a decline in social demands for self-restraint, but rather, a change in the form that such demands take, and perhaps even an intensification of such demands.

<sup>v</sup> Goleman, in fact, argues against the blurring of boundaries between ‘work life’ and ‘private life’ which, he suggests, is itself indicative of poor emotional competence (1998: 287). His intention, he writes, is definitely not to advocate making the workplace a kind of nightmarish ‘emotional salon’ (1998: 287). Nonetheless, he never adequately resolves the inherent conflict of on the one hand arguing in favour of keeping our emotional ‘private’ lives ‘separate’, whilst on the other drawing our attention toward the inevitable influence of our emotional ‘private’ lives at work (Hughes 2003).

<sup>vi</sup> It is not so much that Sennett is not aware of ‘new structures of power and control’ within the flexible workplace he describes (1998: 47), it is more that such structures are understood to be obfuscated --- perhaps consequently, the industrial conflict arising from such structures does not figure prominently in his analysis: it is, that is to say, stylistically rendered as ‘invisible’.

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<sup>vii</sup> Paradoxically, however, the more EI has moved from the realms of academia to the workplace, the more it has lost its acceptance by the scientific community. Significantly, the two writers who coined the term EI --- Peter Salovey and John Mayer --- have increasingly come to distance themselves from Goleman's work, particularly his claims about the predictive power of EI and, most significantly, the equation of high emotional intelligence with 'character' (Jones 1997: 35). There is increasing concern expressed at the gulf between the version of EI provided by the 'serious scientist' and the 'opportunistic journalist/consultant' (Mayer et al. 2001: xiii in Fineman 2004: 727).

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