Adaptive Intelligence is a dramatic reappraisal and reframing of the concept of human intelligence. In a sweeping analysis, Robert J. Sternberg argues that we are using a fatally-flawed, outdated conception of intelligence; one which may promote technological advancement, but which has also accelerated climate change, pollution, the use of weaponry, and inequality. Instead of focusing on the narrow academic skills measured by standardized tests, societies should teach and assess adaptive intelligence, defined as the use of collective talent in service of the common good. This book describes why the outdated notion of intelligence persists, what adaptive intelligence is, and how it could lead humankind on a more positive path.

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ADAPTIVE INTELLIGENCE

Surviving and Thriving in Times of Uncertainty

ROBERT J. STERNBERG
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This book is dedicated to my wife Karin and my five children – Seth, Sara, Samuel, Brittany, and Melody – all of whom have made and will continue to make my world, and I hope, everyone’s world, a much better place.
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I started studying intelligence when I was thirteen years old— in seventh grade. I was interested in intelligence and intelligence testing because I had bombed the intelligence tests I was given as a child. My seventh-grade science project was my chance to make sense of it all. The project did not go altogether well. The head school system psychologist found out I was giving IQ tests to my classmates and warned me never to bring the book—Measuring Intelligence—into school again. I didn’t. Instead, I have spent my career studying intelligence as a researcher.

This book, Adaptive Intelligence, is the culmination of the work I started in seventh grade, trying to understand what intelligence is and how it manifests itself in the world. The years have gone by. Psychometricians’ understanding of intelligence has evolved a bit since 1937—the most accepted models are now hierarchical ones that build on the work of Charles Spearman, Alfred Binet, Lewis Terman, David Wechsler, Raymond Cattell, John Horn, John Carroll, and other pioneers in the field of intelligence. My own understanding of intelligence has changed radically from when I was thirteen years old, and even from when I wrote my first book about intelligence in 1977. At that time, I thought the challenge of understanding intelligence was to understand its information-processing components. Today, I think the challenge is to understand how intelligence can help to save the world—or destroy it. That is what this book is about—how we either use our intelligence to adapt to the environment, in a broad sense, or else use it to bring about our own destruction as a species. We—humanity individually and collectively—have a choice.

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As is always the case, some cling to outdated paradigms until the bitter end, and so I also want especially to thank all those colleagues in the field of intelligence who have sought to broaden the concept of intelligence and have been willing to “defy the crowd” in the face of entrenched and sometimes bitter opposition to such ideas. Finally, I want to thank all those many colleagues in the field of intelligence with whom I have had sometimes profound professional disagreements but who have brought the field to its current level of scholarly advancement. Fields are always built on the work of scholars who disagree but who, through their disagreements, carry the field forward.

Notes