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# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Joan Giesecke
*Universityof Nebraska-Lincoln*, jgiesecke1@unl.edu

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# 1

# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Joan Giesecke

"Leaders have always played a primordial emotional role."[1]

Do you want a new leadership fad? Are you concerned that you are not keeping up with the latest trends? If you answer both questions in the affirmative, join those leaders and managers who are trying to determine if emotional intelligence is real or just a new way to sell books. Is paying attention to emotions more than just remembering to be polite and nice? To answer these questions it helps to go beyond the popular trade books and look at the research in the field. While this is still a new area for research, data have been developed that show there is substance to the theory that emotional intelligence is one of the intelligences that impact how people relate to each other.

To dissect the concept, one can begin by understanding how intelligence is identified. John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey note that, in order to identify an intelligence, psychologists "define it; develop a means to measure it; document its partial or complete independence from known intelligences; and demonstrate that it predicts some real-world criteria."[2]

One challenge in looking at emotional intelligence is to define the term in a way that distinguishes it from other aspects of cognition, motivation, or affect. Some definitions of emotional intelligence do not meet this criterion. For example, Mayer and Salovey remark that definitions that tie emotional intelligence to self-control, persistence, and self-motivation are really concentrating on motivational characteristics rather than on emotional characteristics.[3] These authors prefer the definition that emotional intelligence is "the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual

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growth."[4] The definition they use includes the key characteristic of an intelligence, which is that emotional intelligence increases ones abilities.

Other researchers in identifying emotional intelligence distinguish emotional intelligence from traits and talents. Traits are characteristics, habits, or a set of properties a person possesses, and talents are abilities. In leadership theory the traits of intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability appear to be some of the most important traits for success.[5] Mayer and Salovey distinguish emotional intelligence from such traits by noting that being able to figure out one's emotions is a mental skill while being sociable (i.e., sociability) is a preferred way of behaving or a trait.[6]

Many variations on the definition of emotional intelligence exist in the literature as noted in chapter 2. Nonetheless, the definitions tend to include one or more of the following components: "(a) ability to understand and express oneself; (b) the ability to understand others and relate to them; (c) the ability to manage and control emotions; (d) the ability to manage change, adapt, and solve problems of a personal and interpersonal nature; and (e) the ability to generate positive mood and to be self-motivated."[7] In these components are the two core ideas of emotional intelligence: the ability to manage one's own emotions and the ability to understand and recognize the emotions of others.

## EMOTION DEFINED

Before continuing in the overview of emotional intelligence, it may be useful to take a slight detour and look at the word emotion. While the precise definition of emotion may be debated by psychologists, Daniel Goleman uses the term to refer to "a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and range of propensities to act."[8] He notes that the main categories or families of emotions are: anger, sadness, fear, enjoyments, love, surprise, disgust, and shame.[9] These core families are the key components to consider when examining emotional intelligence and form the frame for further analysis.

## SKEPTICS

The concept of emotional intelligence is not accepted by all theorists. For example, Lynn Waterhouse argues that there is little evidence to support the concept of emotional intelligence. She notes that many definitions of emotional intelligence and different models have been developed. Therefore, for her, this is evidence that emotional intelligence has not developed to the point where it can be considered a valid theory. Further, she feels that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the theory. She also questions statements that have been made claiming that emotional intelligence can be used to predict success and is a more predictive measure of success than a person's

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intelligence quotient (IQ). She cites studies that conclude that emotional intelligence competencies did not predict job success any better than cognitive skills or personality traits.[10]

In response to Waterhouse, Cary Cherniss, Melissa Extein, Daniel Goleman, and Roger Weissberg note that Waterhouse combines scientific claims and popular claims without distinguishing the science from popular literature.[11] These authors agree that emotional intelligence is a young theory, still developing, and still being tested. It is a theory in progress. They note that a consensus on definitions and models is unlikely in the early stages of theoretical work. They also note that there are several models that are being tested that do distinguish between emotional intelligence and IQ, and personality constructs. The authors cite research that links emotional intelligence to success in the workplace and clarify the misimpression noted in the popular literature that emotional intelligence accounts for 80 percent of one's success. Goleman writes that IQ does not predict success among a pool of equally talented top performers. He says that emotional intelligence abilities will better discriminate among a group of people who are all technically capable of competing for a top position.[12]

While the debate about the importance and impact of emotional intelligence will continue, the evidence that emotional intelligence is a set of abilities that can be learned and that can lead to success in the workplace continues to build.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence models vary slightly on the components that define the model. In *The EQ Difference*, Adele Lynn uses five components to characterize emotional intelligence: self-awareness, empathy, social expertness, personal influence, and mastery of purpose and vision.[13] These elements describe how people relate to their internal and external worlds and the competencies needed to use emotional intelligence effectively.

Academic intelligence and emotional intelligence are not in conflict, but are both important. Academic intelligence is one's ability to handle the knowledge, as well as the intellectual and technical skills needed to perform at a level of excellence. Emotional intelligence provides a person with the skills needed to manage emotions and moods. Emotions can easily overwhelm us or highjack how we are feeling. However, we can learn to recognize when we are feeling swept away and can determine how long that feeling lasts. Emotions that are out of control or that are negative can overwhelm our concentration and make it difficult to focus on the task at hand. Even fairly mundane tasks such as remembering a telephone number can become impossible when the working memory is overcome by emotional distress. Contrarily, positive emotions can enhance our ability to perform the tasks at hand. Positive emotions help improve confidence and motivation so that one can pursue excellence.

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Good moods and positive emotions improve flexibility and our success at solving both intellectual and interpersonal problems.

Emotions such as hope and optimism can be great motivators. With hope, one is less likely to give in to anxiety or depression. With optimism, one proceeds expecting success and, if things go wrong, will look for alternatives to achieve success rather than giving up. The self-motivating emotions of hope and optimism aid academic success by helping one to keep going, and to keep trying even when things become frustrating. Positive emotions help us bounce back when things go awry. People unable to summon positive emotions may become depressed, or be unable to dispel a bad mood or stop worrying.

For Goleman then, emotional intelligence is a master aptitude. It impacts all other abilities and can facilitate or interfere with these abilities. "To the degree that our emotions get in the way of or enhance our ability to think and plan, to pursue training for a distant goal . . . they define the limits of our capacity to use our innate mental abilities."[14]

## EMOTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Studies in the 1970s found that executives felt emotions did not belong in the workplace and that empathizing with employees would make it difficult to make the hard decisions that are part of the organizational environment.[15] Today, while some managers may still feel that the head is more important than the heart and that emotions are not the purview of managers, the research increasingly shows that emotional intelligence does impact organizational performance.

Research studies demonstrate that there is a link between emotional intelligence and work performance, although not as strong as stated in popular texts that still claim that emotional intelligence accounts for or determines 80 percent of a person's success. In their compilation of research studies, Vanessa Unch Druskat, Fabio Sala, and Gerald Mount show how emotional intelligence has been measured and linked to performance.[16] A study of air force recruiters showed that those with higher emotional intelligence scores were more successful than their colleagues. The results showed that factors such as geographic region, ethnicity, gender, or age were not predictors of success. Other studies of the military found that soldiers selected for elite combat units, soldiers nominated for officer training by their peers, and those who expressed interest in office training were found to have higher emotional intelligence scores than their counterparts.[17]

A study of navy alcohol-treatment counselors found that counselors with higher empathy and emotional self-awareness scores were more effective than the average counselor. Training and development programs to enhance these competencies could result in more counselors who are sensitive to themselves and sensitive to others.[18]

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A study of executives in the petroleum industry examined competencies that predicted success in this international industry where technical skills are essential. The study found that emotional competencies of achievement orientation, impact and influence, self-confidence, teamwork and cooperation, organizational awareness, empathy, and international flexibility differentiated superior performance from average performance. The three cognitive skills of analytical thinking, conceptual thinking, and information seeking were also key competencies. This research also showed that cognitive and emotional skills were critical to success.[19]

Druskat, Sala, and Mount also include four studies on emotional intelligence and work groups or team success. The studies looked at different competencies and all found that higher emotional intelligence scores correlated to higher team performance. The research also showed that organizational emphasis on external connections over individual aims can lead to higher performance.[20]

## DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE ORGANIZATION

Goleman included questions of managing organizations in his work *Emotional Intelligence*.[21] One area where emotional intelligence comes into play in the organization is in providing feedback to employees. Too often critiques come across as personal attacks and employees play out the same scenarios they use in their families at the workplace. The scenarios become dysfunctional when applied to the workplace. Sarcasms, angry voices, and blanket criticisms only serve to destroy motivation. Employees feel they are being treated as children and may act out in ways that are not productive. Instead, Goleman suggests, as do most management texts, that positive coaching includes concentrating on behaviors and not the person, offering solutions, and being empathetic while discussing difficult issues with employees. For the employee receiving criticism, the challenge is to see the criticism as information that can be used to improve performance. Individuals with high emotional intelligence scores are better able to place the criticism in context and not see it as a personal attack, regardless of how the conversation is approached by the supervisor.

While the research studies cited above provide research evidence of the effectiveness of emotional intelligence, developing emotional intelligence abilities is covered more in popular texts than in research texts. Popular self-help works abound that describe how individuals can become more self-aware, better able to control their own emotions, and better able to understand and influence the emotions of others.

Practical advice for improving one's emotional intelligence is found in texts such as *The EQ Difference*. Here Lynn describes how to develop your own

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"self-coach" or inner voice to help master emotional intelligence. Lynn's seven steps for emotional intelligence are: observe, interpret, pause, direct, reflect, celebrate, and repeat.[22]

Observing involves learning to be more aware of how one is feeling and how others are reacting. It also involves learning to understand your inner voice and learning to not respond to negative voices. Lynn describes 34 inner voices that can control our actions, from the victim voice, "It's not my fault," to the rabbit voice, "Run for safety," to the critical voice, "It's never good enough." More positive voices include the hope voice, "Tomorrow will be better," the optimist voice, "It can be done,"and the creative voice, "Imagine everything." The positive voices help you maintain momentum and move forward. The negative voices derail you and can cause you to fail. Understanding your inner voices is the beginning of emotional self-awareness.

Interpreting the observations becomes the next challenge. Data need to be organized in a usable way. That is, you need to learn how you generally handle a particular emotion and when you are most likely to act negatively. You also need to know how your reaction impacts others. As you pay attention to your emotional reactions, you build an internal database of your approach to emotional encounters. You can then draw on this database of knowledge to prevent yourself from reacting in a negative or inappropriate way to an emotionally charged situation.

After you have interpreted the data take a deep breath and pause; it is time to count to ten, take a cleansing breath, or do whatever you need to do so you can assess the situation and pick a positive rather than a negative response. Perhaps one of the hardest skills for leaders to learn is to pause and not react immediately to a work situation or problem. Yet, taking a moment to step back will give you a chance to change your predictable but negative response to a more positive response.

The big challenge is directing a change in your own responses. Here is where you need to implement control and change a possible negative response to a more positive approach. Emotional intelligence centers on managing emotions, and that includes managing your actions as you experience your feelings. Managing emotions is not the same as feeling no emotions. Not experiencing emotions is as dangerous as experiencing negative emotions. Lack of feelings leaves one unable to relate to others, to provide leadership, or to engage in the organization. Instead healthy emotional responses include understanding and feeling emotions, and controlling your response.

Reflection is the next critical component.[23] Just as assessment and evaluation are keys to successful business processes, reflection is crucial to learning to change our own behaviors. Through reflection you can assess your responses and move closer to living your intentions. You become more intentional in how you live and how you react to those around you. Reflection is a key part of learning from your experiences.

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Next, celebrate successes. Good leaders know the importance of celebrating successes at work. They understand the importance of acknowledging and celebrating goal achievement and employee successes. Yet, too often we forget to celebrate intangible achievements and positive changes in our own behavior. A celebration can help reinforce the importance of making changes in behavior that can lead to success in our lives.

Finally, repeat successes. It is important to find your own ways of improving your emotional intelligence and taking control of your reactions. You choose how you want to react to a situation. Pick a positive approach and you will be more likely to succeed.

The self-coaching approach aims at long-term changes in our behavior to become more aware of the impact our emotions have on our actions. Other authors provide simpler systems and advice to get one started on controlling emotions while building the kind of in-depth database of reactions advocated by Goleman. In a brief article by Dawn Raffel in the popular magazine *O, The Oprah Magazine,* Ana Maravelas, a corporate consultant, suggests that the two self-defeating habits of smart people are to blame others or to blame themselves when things go wrong. Each of these self-defeating inner voices results in frustration and can lead to rage. Instead of giving in to these two inner voices and the resulting emotion or response, Maravelas suggests thinking of these reactions as "stinky twins of BO (blame others) and BS (blame self)."[24] To combat these reactions, she suggests practicing curiosity. Rather than giving in to these destructive emotions, you can start by asking questions, finding out more about the situation, and clarifying your assumptions. By asking questions and keeping a dialogue going, you will move past the initial reaction to a more thoughtful, emotional response.

## INFLUENCING THE EMOTIONS OF OTHERS

The second part of emotional intelligence is understanding and influencing the emotions of others. Emotions can be spread among people. One can be influenced by someone else's bad mood. Employees act differently when they believe the boss is in a good mood rather than a bad mood. A bad mood or toxic reaction by a leader can cause anxiety in others, or can cause a group to mirror the leader's behavior, thereby reinforcing a toxic environment. Understanding why these reactions occur and how to manage them is a key part of effective leadership and is the core competency in social intelligence.

Karl Albrecht defines social intelligence as "the ability to get along with others and to get them to cooperate with you."[25] He enumerates the externally oriented competencies that lead to successful interactions with others. Albrecht lists five competency areas that lead to nourishing rather than toxic behaviors: situational awareness, presence, authenticity, clarity, and empathy.[26]

Situational awareness involves observing social interactions and understanding people's intentions. People who can read a social situation and react

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appropriately are more likely to have positive interactions than those who misunderstand the context and environment in which they operate.

Presence is the effect one has on others. It includes the physical impression one makes as well as the impact that one's mood and demeanor have on others.[27] Presence also encompasses the nonverbal cues one gives off in conversations with others.

Authentic people are those who are honest about whom they are and act accordingly. Authentic leaders are true to themselves while understanding how to manage the perception others have of them. They know which personality traits to reveal and when so that they create a positive impression with others. "Authentic leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts as well as their heads."[28]

Authenticity is not a process of manipulating others. It is a process of understanding how others are reacting and feeling, and choosing to use those parts of one's personality and emotional and social intelligence to influence the behavior of others. Authentic leaders match their words with their actions. They know themselves. They get to know the people with whom they regularly interact. They understand the organizational context in which they operate. Authentic leaders balance these three elements and create an effective environment.

Clarity as a competency is the ability to be clear in communicating both verbally and with non-verbal cues. Clarity in communication involves avoiding jargon, using active voice, and crafting well-structured sentences. Social intelligence, though, includes more than just good communication skills. It also involves using language to advance a discussion rather than to cut off ideas, discourage others, or assign blame. Positive language promotes discussion and encourages others to participate in the interaction.

Empathy is another key competency in social intelligence. Empathy is moving beyond understanding the feelings of others to "a state of positive feelings between two people, commonly referred to as a condition of rapport."[29] By practicing empathy, one establishes a bond with others that leads to positive interactions and improved interpersonal relations.

Leaders who practice these competencies create organizations that have a positive environment. A positive working environment encourages nurturing behaviors rather than toxic behaviors. People are treated with respect and are engaged in the organizations. Further, leaders who practice good social intelligence skills create organizations that inspire employee loyalty and productivity. Leaders who create toxic environments and do not practice social intelligence competencies create organizations with high turnover rates, and with employees who do enough to get by but are unlikely to excel.

## CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence, as backed by the research on this important aspect of ourselves, helps leaders move beyond basic "people skills" to understanding

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how one's own reactions and feelings impact how one is perceived by others. Leaders and managers need to understand their own emotions and recognize and understand the feelings of those around them. Leaders are more successful when they pay attention to their social interactions with others in the workplace and the impact they as leaders have on those around them. It is also important for leaders to understand the impact that others' emotions have on them. When leaders are aware of the emotional side of the workplace along with the technical processes of getting tasks and goals accomplished, they are better able to create a working environment that encourages excellence.

"Managing your emotions means something quite different from stifling them. It means understanding them and then using that understanding to turn situations to our benefit."[30]

## NOTES

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