

# What emotional intelligence is and is not

## KEY WORDS

- » Communication
- » Emotional intelligence
- » Emotional literacy
- » Empathy
- » Motivation
- » Self-awareness

Emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional literacy are useful in the toolkit of a leader or manager who seeks to influence people through thoughts and emotions. Like all leadership tools, EI can be used for the right purposes, or it can be abused and used to manipulate people. This article will explore the main aspects of EI, before we explore in the next article how to develop EI and what the benefits of developing this skill might be.

At its core, leadership is about influencing people to complete a job correctly and efficiently. There are many ways of influencing people from coercing and commanding, to servant leadership and friendliness. What all approaches have in common is a need for a leader or manager to understand, and be able to influence, the emotions, thoughts and feelings of others.

This skill is known as emotional intelligence (EI), which is the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically.

## WHAT EI IS

Daniel Goleman, an American psychologist, is one of the leading proponents of EI. Goleman (1998) suggests there are five emotional processes that comprise EI.

### Being self-aware

People who are self-aware know how they are perceived by others, and they understand their own emotional response to stimuli (e.g. a person or situation). People who are aware of their own emotional responses are confident and self-assured. They are honest with themselves, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and use their strengths while working to improve their weaknesses. For some theorists, being self-aware is the most important feature of EI (Bar-On and Parker, 2000).

### Being empathetic

Empathy is understanding the emotional response other people have to stimuli and being

aware of how emotions influence behaviours. Empathy is not the same as sympathy; it is understanding and appreciating the emotions of others rather than experiencing those emotions as well.

Some influential commentators on EI suggest empathy is its second most important feature (Salovey and Mayer, 1989).

### Being able to self-regulate

People with high EI are able to regulate their emotional responses to stimuli. People who can self-regulate their emotions can think before they act or speak, people with EI rarely have to apologise to people for speaking out of turn. People who have low EI, or have limited EI, are often apologising to those they have upset, including themselves, because they are unable, or unwilling, to regulate what they say and how they behave.

Self-regulation also means having conviction in decisions made, integrity and the ability to manage change.

### Being motivated

People with a high degree of EI can be among the most motivated people in the workforce. People who are internally motivated do not need constant praise. They gain satisfaction from developing long-term relationships and achieving long-term goals, rather than deferring to immediate results.

People with low or no EI often need to be motivated greatly as they either don't have, or fail to respond to, the internal stimulus that drives

people with EI. Such people with low EI may need regular praise and can require a lot of support, so are quite draining to lead and manage.

### Being socially adept

People who are socially adept are very skilled in social situations. A socially adept manager (or leader) is good at handling difficult people and disputes, and use the skills of those around them to their full advantage, employing and promoting these above their own.

Being socially adept is not the same as being gregarious, it is more the art of 'people reading' and interacting at a level and with an intensity that the other person needs.

### THE ABILITY MODEL

Another model that explains EI is the ability model, Salovey and Grewal (2005) regard EI as a tool to process emotional information and use it to navigate the social environment. The model proposes that individuals vary in their ability to process information of an emotional nature, which manifests itself in certain adaptive behaviors. The model claims that EI includes four types of abilities:

- ▶▶ Perceiving emotions: the ability to detect and decipher emotions in faces, pictures and voices of one's self and others
- ▶▶ Using emotions: The ability to harness emotions to complete a task that fits one's current mood
- ▶▶ Understanding emotions: The ability to interpret the meaning and impact of emotional responses to people and situations both in one's self and in others. This is seeing beyond the emotion to what the emotion actually means and understanding the complex relationship and subtleties between emotions
- ▶▶ Managing emotions: The ability to regulate one's own and other's emotions.

EI relates to the ability to detect, understand, manage and respond to the emotional language of self and of others. In this sense EI is a communication tool, useful for both verbal and non-verbal communication. These skills of EI apply equally to being able to interpret and talk to others as they do to being able to respond to one's own emotional responses.

### WHAT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IS NOT

EI is not about being emotional! Being emotional in this sense means being out of control, or being controlled by one's emotions. A frequent temptation is to support individuals who are displaying a heightened emotional response to a given stimulus and become personally affected by the issue.

EI is also not about using or manipulating the emotions of other people to achieve one's own goals in a malicious way.

### CONCLUSION

EI is increasingly being seen as a useful life skill not only for healthcare professionals but also for manager and leaders. Interestingly, many of the skills associated with EI in leadership and management are the same skills health and social care professional use every day during work.

EI is many faceted and to be truly emotionally intelligent, the leader or manager needs to master all the elements of EI. EI is not the practice of manipulating others and it is not the practice of responding to emotional situations in an emotionally uncontrolled way.

### KEYPOINTS

- ▶▶ EI requires self-awareness
- ▶▶ People with high emotionally intelligence regulate their response to stimuli, such as people and situations
- ▶▶ Understanding the emotions of others allows managers and leaders to understand their motivations, and thus know how to better motivate someone
- ▶▶ Being empathetic and socially adept are importance skills.

In the next paper in this series we will examine how EI can be developed and what the benefits of developing this skill might be.

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