

Learning emotional intelligence and what it can do for you

KEY WORDS

- » Assertiveness
- » Communication
- » Emotional intelligence
- » Emotional literacy
- » Leadership
- » Resilience

Having learnt what emotional intelligence (EI) is, in this second article, we discover that EI can be developed through learning and regularly implementing strategies. There are tools available to measure change in EI, which is measured as an emotional quotient. Improving understanding of our strengths and weaknesses, how we form opinions and biases, and reflecting on situations alone and with others can enhance our EI, and thus improve our success. EI enables a leader or manager to gain the trust, as well as the respect, of his or her employees. This is particularly relevant in people-facing workplaces, such as the healthcare sector.

In the first article in this series we explored what emotional intelligence (EI) is and what it is not (Ellis, 2017). We saw how EI requires managers to be self-aware and how managers can motivate themselves and others through the use of EI. We also saw how EI is not about sharing the emotional responses of others to situations or people, but having the ability to understand the reason for the emotion and having a measured emotionally-literate response to it. In this article we explore how one might become more emotionally literate and what this can do for you as a leader or manager.

LEARNING, MEASURING AND DEVELOPING EI

The literature about EI suggests it can be learnt and that it can be grown. Serrat (2017) tells us:

“The truth is that some will be more naturally gifted than others but the good news is that emotional intelligence skills can be learned. (This must be so because emotional intelligence is shown to increase with age.) However, for this to happen, people must be personally motivated, practice extensively what they learn, receive feedback, and reinforce their new skills.”

The converse of this is also true. Some managers and leaders will choose not to grow their EI. Instead of opting for trust from their staff they content themselves with respect for their ability as a manager. This does not really work in people-facing workplaces, such as health and social care,

as the manager needs to know that he or she has the trust of his or her employees who will work to the agreed standard, and beyond, whether the manager is present or not.

The measure for EI is the emotional quotient (EQ). It is similar to IQ, the intelligence quotient. Unlike EQ, however, you cannot grow your IQ, as IQ is fixed. There are books, articles and online tools for measuring EQ; you can use these to measure EQ at a point in time, engage in some EI development activities and then re-measure your EQ. It is perhaps advisable to use the same measurement tool(s) on both occasions, as this will give a more accurate measure of the change.

Some simple strategies you can apply in the workplace, at home and in any social situation can contribute to the development of EI in the individual. As with all self-improvement techniques, you have to want to improve, learn the strategies, put the strategy in place and then use it regularly. Again, it is worth measuring your success in doing this, as success breeds self-belief and self-belief grows EI.

Be honest with yourself about who you are and how you behave. Identify what is good in your personality and what is not so good. Work on the negative, or weak, personality traits and use your more positive traits regularly. For example, if you connect with people through your sense of humour, use this a lot, but wisely. If you do not always pay attention when people are speaking to you and you miss some of what they are saying, work hard at paying attention and being seen to do so.

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Consider how you form your opinions and biases about people, understand the issues that underlie your judgements and reflect on why this might be the case (Goleman, 1995). Consider not only what drives you to stereotype others, but also what others might see in you and how they judge you as a result.

Do you fail to understand the needs of others and always ensure you get your point of view across first? Instead, ask questions of what is said and show an interest in the responses. Understand others' opinions before sharing your own; or perhaps choosing not to. Do you always need to be the centre of attention? Do you need to prop your ego up with compliments? Try promoting others instead. Put them first, point praise to them (where due) and support them in their growth and achievements. Many see humility and the ability to put others first as a sign of strength of character in leaders (Lawrence, 2006).

Learn to be calm and measured in your interactions with others, even when they – or you – are upset. Be careful to actively listen, think and control your response so it is not angry or judgemental. Respond to the situation or action without appearing to judge the person. Always reflect in and on action, alone and with others. Use supervision or keep a diary. Find a space in which to think about your actions and activities each day. Remember reflection, however you do it, is meant to provide you with the tools to manage similar situations in the future. This enables you to use your learning to develop yourself. If you are finding reflecting on a situation or relationship hard, find someone to talk to about it; this person must be able to question and be honest with you. Together you can rehearse your response to challenging situations and, grow your EI (Goleman et al, 2001).

WHAT EI CAN DO FOR YOU

As suggested above, EI (or EQ) is perhaps a better measure of the likelihood of success in many health and social care roles than IQ. Sternberg (1996) suggests that IQ may be responsible for as little as one-tenth of the variation in performance between individuals in a particular job. Notably, some commentators feel there is an inverse relationship between IQ and EQ, with more intelligent people having lower EQ and *vice versa* (Petrides et al, 2004). In all probability, this applies

only at the extremes. When looking for team members in the recruitment process, however, the emotionally-intelligent leader will ask: "Am I looking for people who are clever or am I looking for people who understand people?" In most cases, the answer is both. In some roles you might sacrifice a bit of one for more of the other; however, employing people with no EI may be a dangerous undertaking. A leader with developed EI will have the skills to understand what their team needs in the way of additional technical and people skills and will have developed the softer skills needed to spot what they want in the interview scenario. Sometimes employing the more rounded candidate will be better for the team than employing the best qualified one.

Leaders with developed EI are more productive. They are better at skills such as delegation, which support organisational and team productivity, as well as developing the individuals who are delegated to. Increased EI is also good for managing stress. Being self-aware with increased self-confidence means the emotionally-intelligent manager can avoid becoming stressed, as he or she handles situations better, or recognises and manages stress early. The manager with EI will also recognise and manage stress in a meaningful way when it arises in the team. Better still, managers and leaders with well-developed EI are better at managing conflict and building relationships, so stress is less of a feature of the workplace. Goleman (2006) suggests high levels of EI are also associated with concepts of love and spirituality, which contribute to stability, continuity and harmony.

CONCLUSION

We have seen in this article that EI can both be learnt and developed. Some of the methods and techniques the leader can use to develop his or her own EI have been presented. We have seen that developing and using EI in the workplace has benefits for the leader, the individuals who work with him or her and the wider team.

The challenge from this, and the previous article in this series, is to take on the messages about EI, examine your own level of EI and do something about using the skills you have to benefit the team as well as growing the elements you are missing.



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