

Emotional Intelligence

What is it? Why is it Important?

According to psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer, emotional intelligence may be defined as, “the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and others, and the use of feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in one’s life.” Put another way, this concept means recognizing that emotions can impact behavior and affect people (positively and negatively), therefore it’s important to learn how to manage those emotions – both our own and others – especially when we are under stress.

When emotional intelligence came on the scene in the 1990s, it presented a most unusual finding: people with average IQs *outperform* those with the highest IQs 70% of the time. This concept threw a monkey wrench into what many people had always assumed was the only source of success — intelligence quotient, or IQ. Today, research points to emotional intelligence as *the* crucial element that separates star performers from the rest of the pack.

Emotional intelligence is pretty intangible, but it’s something that dwells within each of us. Emotional intelligence, or EQ, “affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that achieve positive results.”

What Emotional Intelligence Is

Salovey and Mayer introduced the concept of emotional intelligence and demonstrated how it might be measured. They believed that people with high EI (their term for emotional intelligence) could solve a variety of emotion-related problems, and do so both accurately and quickly.

High EI people, for example, can accurately perceive emotions in people’s faces. Such individuals also know how to use emotional incidents in their lives to promote specific types of thinking.

For instance, they understand that sadness promotes analytical thought and so they may prefer to analyze things when they are in a sad mood. Mayer notes that high EI people also grasp the meanings that emotions convey: “They know that angry people can be dangerous, that happiness means that someone wants to join with others, and that some sad people may prefer to be alone.”

Does Emotional Intelligence Exist?

To test whether EI exists, Salovey, Mayer, and David Caruso developed a number of ability measures. They wanted to determine if they could measure emotional intelligence abilities, if these abilities improved with age (generally thought to be a characteristic of intelligence), and if, taken together, they formed a cohesive intelligence.

One sort of test question they devised asked test-takers to identify the emotions expressed in a photograph of a face: for instance, to understand that sadness might be indicated by a frown. Another type of question asked people how emotional reactions unfold. For example:

Mike was sad, but an hour later he felt guilty. What happened in between? (Choose one):

- A. Mike took a neighbor to a medical appointment to help him out.
- B. Mike lacked the energy to call his mother, and missed calling her on her birthday.

High EI test-takers recognize that alternative B, the missed birthday phone call, would better account for Mike’s change in mood from sadness to guilt.

The ability to answer such questions correctly appears to improve as children grow older. In addition, people who perform well in some areas also tend to do well on others as well. “For these reasons and others, EI is now believed to exist and is considered by many to be an established intelligence.”

What Emotional Intelligence is Not

The concept of emotional intelligence is not always readily understood. The researchers note that emotional intelligence is *not* agreeableness, optimism, happiness, nor is it calmness or motivation. “Such qualities, although important, have little to do with intelligence, little to do with emotions, and nearly nothing to do with actual emotional intelligence.”

Mayer and his colleagues suggested in an *American Psychologist* article, “... groups of widely studied personality traits, including motives such as the need for achievement, self-related concepts such as self-control, emotional traits such as happiness, and social styles such as assertiveness should be called what they are, rather than being mixed together in haphazard-seeming assortments and named emotional intelligence.”

Positivity Ratio

As noted in this month’s cover story in *Employee Assistance Report*, determining an individual’s positivity ratio is an important part of *growing* an individual’s emotional intelligence. Psychologist Barbara Frederickson recommends promoting a 3:1 Positivity Ratio – in other words, a ratio of *3 positive experiences to every 1 that is negative*. The idea is that since people often remember negative experiences much more than positive ones, using this 3:1 ratio when working with clients can help offset this negative tendency.

Sample of a Positivity Self-Test

How positive are *you*? More important, how positive are the individuals participating in this Brown Bag session? Ask participants to review the past day (i.e., from this time yesterday up to right now). Using Dr. Frederickson’s 0-4 scale listed below, each participant should indicate the greatest degree that he or she experienced each of the following feelings.

- 0 = Not at all
- 1 = A little bit
- 2 = Moderately

- 3 = Quite a bit
- 4 = Extremely

- What is the most amused, fun-loving, or silliest that you felt? _____
- What is the angriest, most irritated or annoyed you felt? _____
- What is the most ashamed, humiliated, or disgraced you felt? _____
- What is the greatest sense of awe, wonder, or amazement you felt? _____
- What is the most contemptuous, scornful, or disdainful you felt? _____
- What is the most disgusted, distasteful, or revolting you felt? _____
- What is the most embarrassed or self-conscious you felt? _____
- What is the most grateful, appreciative, or thankful you felt? _____
- What is the guiltiest, most repentant or blameworthy you felt? _____
- What is the most hateful, distrustful, or suspicious you felt? _____
- What is the most hopeful, optimistic, or encouraged you felt? _____
- What is the most inspired, uplifted, or elevated you felt? _____
- What is the most interested, alert, or curious you felt? _____
- What is the most joyful, glad, or happiest you felt? _____
- What is the most love, closeness, or trust you felt? _____
- What is the proudest, most confident or self-assured you felt? _____
- What is the saddest, most downhearted or unhappiest you felt? _____
- What is the most scared, fearful, or afraid you felt? _____



- What is the most serene, content, or peaceful you felt? _____
- What is the most stressed, nervous, or overwhelmed you felt? _____

To gain a more reliable picture of your positivity ratio, Dr. Frederickson recommends that participants take this same short survey each evening for two weeks. However, even then, don't be discouraged if you're not pleased with the results. *According to Dr. Frederickson, 80% of adults fall short of the suggested 3-to-1 ratio.*

“The concept of emotional intelligence has become a very hot topic of psychological research in recent years, especially in regards to how it affects today's workforce. Businesses are essentially people, so anything that impacts the effectiveness of people's minds also impacts the businesses they run or work for.”

(**Editor's note:** In addition to the 3:1 Positivity Ratio, other suggestions on growing emotional intelligence are presented in this month's cover story in *Employee Assistance Report*.)

Why Emotional Intelligence is Important

The concept of emotional intelligence has become a hot topic of psychological research in recent years, especially in regards to how it affects today's workforce. Businesses are essentially people, so anything that impacts the effectiveness of people's minds also impacts the businesses they run or work for. According to writer and consultant Royale Scuderi, the following are a few of the ways in which emotional intelligence is important:

❖ **Mental well-being** – Emotional intelligence affects our attitude and outlook on life. It can also help alleviate anxiety and avoid depression and mood swings. A high level of emotional

intelligence directly correlates to a positive attitude and happier outlook on life.

❖ **Relationships** – By better understanding and managing our emotions, we are better able to communicate our feelings in a more constructive way. We are also better able to understand and relate to those with whom we are in relationships. Understanding the needs, feelings, and responses of those we care about leads to stronger and more fulfilling relationships.

❖ **Conflict resolution** – When we can discern people's emotions and empathize with their perspective, it's much easier to resolve conflicts or possibly avoid them before they start. We are also better at negotiation due to the nature of our ability to understand the needs and desires of others. It's easier to give people what they want if we can perceive what it is.

(**Editor's note:** For additional examples, see the Handout section on page 4.)

Summary

Numerous experts believe that an individual's emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) may be more important than his or her IQ and is certainly a better predictor of success, quality of relationships, and overall happiness.

References

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There are Numerous Reasons Why Emotional Intelligence is Important



Emotional intelligence involves an individual's ability to recognize and understand our emotions and reactions, referred to as *self-awareness*; manage and adapt one's emotions, reactions and responses, known as *self-management*; and to discern the feelings of others, understand their emotions, and use this understanding to better relate to others, or *empathy*.

Ways in Which Emotional Intelligence is Important

There are numerous ways in which emotional intelligence is important. Several of them were listed in the main section of this *Brown Bagger* insert. Others are listed here:

❖ **Physical health** – The ability to take care of our bodies and especially to manage our stress, which has an incredible impact on our overall wellness, is heavily tied to our emotional intelligence. Only by being aware of our emotional state and our reactions to stress in our lives can we hope to manage stress and maintain good health.

❖ **Success** – Higher emotional intelligence helps us to be stronger internal motivators, which can reduce procrastination, increase self-confidence, and improve our ability to focus on a goal. It also allows us to create better networks of

support, overcome setbacks, and persevere with a more resilient outlook. Our ability to delay gratification and see the long-term directly affects our ability to succeed.

❖ **Leadership** – The ability to understand what motivates others, relate in a positive manner, and to build stronger bonds with others in the workplace inevitably makes those with higher emotional intelligence better leaders. An effective leader can recognize what the needs of his people are, so that those needs can be met in a way that encourages higher performance and workplace satisfaction. An emotionally savvy and intelligent leader is also able to build stronger teams by strategically utilizing the emotional diversity of their team members to benefit the team as a whole.



Summary

Emotional intelligence is still not completely understood, but we do know that emotions play a crucial role in the overall quality of our personal and professional lives, more critical even than our measure of intelligence quotient (IQ).

Source: Royale Scuderi, "Emotional Intelligence: Why is it Important?"