

Emotional Intelligence

Why should it matter to you?

By Suzi Skinner
M. Appl.Sci. (Coaching Psychology)

You have no doubt heard about Emotional Intelligence and what it means, however are you really clear about it involves? The term sounds great and the “idea” of it is interesting but what difference is it really making to people in business? And why should it matter to you?

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a concept that has grown radically in terms of interest and research over the past 10 years. Nowadays it is a popular development model used by corporations and executives to build and sustain great performance in people and organisations.

As the research continues to grow, Emotional intelligence is also being credited, in leading organisations, with distinguishing the best performers from the average ones.

To understand the overall simplicity of EI, consider someone in your personal or professional life that has made a big impression on you. Perhaps an executive you used to work for, or a colleague that remains memorable?

What was it about that person that stands out?

- Perhaps the manager you had in mind took a personal interest in your development/ took the time to discuss your options and facilitated your career growth?
- Perhaps it was a colleague who was incredibly skilled at building relationships with your co-workers and customers – and as such, made a positive impact on your work environment – so much so that working with them was a real pleasure?
- Or perhaps it was someone who helped you through a difficult time, who listened and guided you and assisted you whenever they could?

Either way, these are examples of colleagues that had an impact on you. And each are indicative of how a person high in Emotional Intelligence may behave.

Emotional Intelligence allows us to take our common sense thinking of these general people skills a step further. Whilst we have all being displaying some of these behaviours naturally, the concept of Emotional Intelligence enables us to really define “people characteristics”. It gives us a framework from which we can look at ourselves (and others) and identify areas where we can develop.

Who’s behind Emotional Intelligence?

Mayer and Salovey first introduced the term Emotional Intelligence to the world in 1997. They defined it as: “the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in self and others”.

Daniel Goleman (who is credited with taking Emotional Intelligence to the masses) took it a step further. He defined it as “the capacity for recognising our own feelings

and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in others". (Goleman 1998)

Where you may be familiar with I.Q – measured by your intellectual abilities such as your verbal fluency or abstract reasoning ability, E.Q (or EI) is measured by your emotional abilities. EI is about how well you are able to identify the emotions in yourself (and others) and act in ways that ensure good outcomes.

Put simply, EI is about how you manage yourself and those around you. It is about how self aware you are of your own strengths/ your weaknesses/ your hot buttons and how in turn, these personal characteristics affect how you deal with others. All day, every day.

There have been hundreds of studies done over the past 10 years to determine what EI really means for people and for business overall. These studies have shown that I.Q. alone is not enough to create success in a job (– or life for that matter). Some studies attribute one's I.Q. at less than 25% of the reason that they may be successful in their job. What the studies highlight is that it is the EI skills, the people competencies that are making the difference between successful and not so successful performers.

Consider someone you have worked with that did not possess these so called EI skills. What were they like to work with? How well did they manage their moods? How did they manage the people around them? And how did they make you feel?

And then compare this to the person you recalled earlier in this article, that you intuitively think is good with their emotions. What do you notice that is different about them? How effectively do they deal with negative situations? And ideally, how do they turn these negatives into positives?

Understanding E.I In Detail

Firstly it is important to point out the good news about EI - this is that the skills involved can be learnt. The four areas below represent "groups of skills" that make up the fundamentals of EI and research proves, you and I can actually become familiar with them, learn them and then apply them everyday.

To do this, there are 4 key areas that must be understood are:

- 1) Self Awareness – your personal skills (personal competence)
- 2) Self Management – your personal skills (personal competence)
- 3) Social Awareness – your skills relating to others (social competence)
- 4) Relationship Management –your skills relating to others (social competence)

1) Self Awareness

Self Awareness is always the starting point. How can you learn to manage others better if you do not understand yourself?

Consider these questions:

- Do you know how you feel? And can you truthfully assess your emotions?
For example: *"I feel anxious at the moment"* vs *"I can't seem to concentrate and I don't know why"*

- When you are feeling an emotion, are you able to label and own this rather than blame it on someone or something else? For example: *“I feel frustrated”* vs *“My work never gives me what I need”*
- Can you actually talk about what you are feeling and reflect on this? *“I feel really energised today and I know it is because I really enjoy dealing with the people in this job”*
- And are you able to make the link between what you are feeling and how that may be affecting your performance? *“When I am motivated I am really focused and far more efficient”*
- Can you accurately list what you are strong in and where you need development? *“My customer building skills are really strong but I know I need help when it comes to resolving conflict well”*

The key here is to spend time in reflection. Take time to understand what makes you happy and start to recognise how you can manage yourself to achieve more of this.

Interestingly one’s ability to accurately assess themselves (a sign of high self awareness) has been shown as the key characteristic of superior performance. Whilst average performers tend to overestimate their strengths, top performers rarely do. Which one are you?

2) Self Management

Self Management is as it sounds. It is all about how you manage yourself emotionally. It is made up of characteristics such as Emotional Self control; Trustworthiness and Conscientiousness. Consider people in your life that are under stress and look at how they either cope (or don’t cope) with this emotional state. Do you notice them flying off the handle at the smallest hiccup? Or do they actively remove themselves from stressful situations until they are able to handle it well?

Interestingly it is often the people that are able to handle themselves well, across a range of challenging situations, that we trust. And in this way, it becomes a good barometer for our own self management skills – particularly when we apply the questions to ourselves. Are you consistent in managing challenging situations (and therefore displaying good self management?) Or are you affected by these situations and allow them to determine your moods?

Self Management also refers to your ability to manage your self in terms of your performance/ motivation and on going achievement of goals or objectives. How well you pay attention to detail, how well you plan and how thorough you are in achieving your aims are all indicative of your abilities in this area.

The ability to handle change (and how effectively you adapt to it), is also a key skill in Self Management. Whilst “change” used to be considered something that came and went over time, the reality of working (and life) today means that change is constant. Consider how you have responded to recent change in your life. Were you one of the resistant group congregating at the water cooler? Or were you the one continuing on your journey and just getting on with the job? Again top performers in organisations not only adapt to change quickly, they embrace it.

3) Social Awareness

This third area of the EI framework now takes into account your abilities to interact/influence and motivate others. It is about how you take your personal competencies and apply them externally.

These skills in social awareness are highly influenced by the 2 previous EI competencies – good self awareness and self management. How well you know yourself (and your hot buttons) and how you manage these will influence how you interact with others. Social skills such as your ability to empathise, help others and even be aware of the political undercurrents in your organisation are all based around your self - perception skills.

4) Relationship Management

Potentially the key result of high EI is the ability to encourage positive outcomes in others. By this I mean the ability to read the reactions of people that you deal with and consciously manage your own communication so that you get a good outcome.

Whilst this idea is very simple, it requires all the skills we have referred to in the 3 previous sections. By being consciously aware, for example, of how dealing with complaints can make you feel inadequate (and therefore anxious), a person high in EI may reframe this complaint in such a way that it is a positive encounter. By perceiving the complaint as an opportunity to make a lasting positive impression on the person, one can actively self manage one's emotions and drive the interaction in a positive direction.

Skills such as Developing others, Influencing, Conflict management and even Leadership are all part of Relationship Management. And they are all dependent on your communication skills. These communication skills allow you to give and take emotional information well and deal with challenging situations in a straightforward manner. Open communication, open sharing, active listening are all hallmarks of good relationship management skills and are the cornerstone of managing yourself to get good/great and excellent results from others.

So what can you do next?

As you now know, EI skills can be learnt and practised every day. By becoming more familiar with what skills comprise EI (the first step in improving your self awareness), you are then on the road to improving your abilities in this area.

Importantly, what makes Emotional Intelligence so interesting is that those high in E.I. are not strong in just one of the four areas (as perhaps may have been interpreted from some examples earlier). They actually show strengths across a range of these 4 areas – Self Awareness/ Self Management/ Social Awareness and Relationship Management - and in so doing, have a critical mass of E.I. strengths that they continuously display.

So the good news for all of us is that, as the research shows, people are able to increase their abilities in each area, by learning the competencies that sit within them. And if this is of interest to you, perhaps it is time to do a little research into the area, sign up for a workshop or even engage a Coach to accelerate the journey for you!

If you would like more information please contact: suzi.skinner@selftalk.com.au