

Drive Results with Emotional Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

Hard skills may get your foot in the door, however soft skills enable you to open the doors to come. Hard skills (usually technical) are measurable and trained or gained through education. In contrast, soft skills (such as emotional intelligence) are inexact, developed, and ironically often harder to attain.

As driven individuals we continuously work on building our hard skills so why do we often neglect to similarly enhance our soft skills? Leading a project team forward demands more than giving corporal orders to hit targets. It requires building strong relationships within and across teams to create a positive, collaborative, and trusting environment. People do their best work when they feel supported, and people drive processes.

This paper advises how you can elevate your soft skills as a team leader which alongside hard skills will power a project team forward to a successful outcome. Both skills complement one another and are necessary to unleash your full potential.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the term “Emotional Intelligence” has become increasingly popular in the workplace particularly around successful leadership. An unusual finding that served as a missing link was that people with the highest levels of intelligence (IQ) outperform those with average IQs just 20 percent of the time, while people with average IQs outperform those with high IQs 70 percent of the time. Researchers realised there must be another variable that explained success above and beyond one’s IQ and years of research and countless studies pointed to Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) as the overriding factor.

It is no longer enough for us to only be a transactional leader focusing on process and control. We need to also be transformational leaders alongside to inspire others and make our team feel valued in the workplace. Transactional leadership is reactive whereas transformational leadership is proactive.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional intelligence is defined as your ability to recognise and understand emotions in yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your own behavior and relationships. Emotional intelligence is the “something” in each of us that is intangible. It affects how we manage behavior, navigate social complexities, and make personal decisions that can achieve positive results when applied.

Our first reaction to any event is always going to be an emotional one. We have no control over this part of the process, our brains are wired this way. You do, however, control the thoughts that follow this emotion, and you have a great deal of say in how you react thereafter - if you are aware of it.

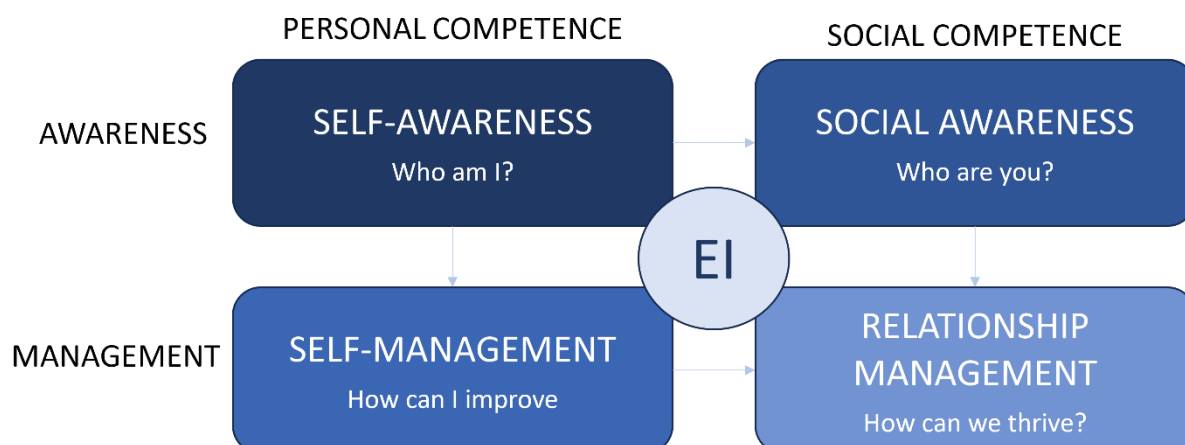
How Can You Gain This Superpower and Release Your Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence comprises of four core principles that all intertwine with one another and are all shown to be beneficial to enhance one’s interpersonal skills.

To truly improve your ability in these four skills, you first need to better understand each skill and what it looks like in action. These skills pair up under two primary competencies: personal competence and social competence.

Personal competence is made up of your self-awareness and self-management skills, which focus more on you individually than on your interactions with other people. Personal competence is your ability to stay aware of your emotions and manage your behavior and tendencies. Social competence is made up of your social awareness and relationship management skills; social competence is your ability to understand other people’s moods, behavior, and motives to improve the quality of your relationships.

Four Core Competencies of Emotional Intelligence



SELF-AWARENESS

How well do we really know ourselves? We may know what we like, and dislike, but do we deeply understand our emotions, so we do not become overwhelmed by them? Being tuned in to one's own self allows us to have more control over our emotions, allowing us to understand our own emotional triggers. You will also have greater control over your mindset that can impact how you respond and react to certain situations, and it will encourage you to search for the positives over the negatives in any situation. It also helps us greater understand our own strengths and weaknesses, all of which helps us to solve problems more effectively along with strengthening our social skills and working more effectively with others.

Self-aware leaders are not solely focused on individual wins, instead they look to inspire their team members to succeed. They do this by assessing themselves for ways to improve and grow both internally as individuals and externally by listening to how others view them.

Internal self-awareness is when we have a clear understanding of our own values, thoughts, and emotions. We can do this through self-reflection. Instead of asking yourself why you felt that way start asking yourself what made you feel that way. Questions that begin with "Why" encourage us to jump to conclusions that might not even be true. An example of this could be when we did not receive a positive review of our work. We might think, "Why are they unhappy with my work?" Our mind becomes overconsumed with negative emotions and self-doubting thoughts that ultimately don't help us. The question to ourselves instead could be, "What can I do to improve my skills and use this as a learning opportunity to produce better work for the future?" This question is more productive and allows us to focus our mind on objectives and future goals rather than past mistakes. We still accept that we made a mistake but don't let it control us. In these situations, it is good practice to write down your thoughts and track your progress to try and identify patterns of behaviour. Another skill to being self-aware is to be open to your own weaknesses. Working in partnership with a team by utilizing other members' expertise demonstrates better decision-making skills which will inevitably increase the productivity of the task and ultimately reduce procrastination on oneself.

External self-awareness is about understanding how others view us. People have their own perspectives on us based on our values, personality traits, and goals. External self-awareness helps leaders create a truly open and safe working environment where team members and peers can be honest with you. Feedback can make people squirm, but it gives you an objective view of how others feel towards you. It can tell us about our communication skills or if we need to improve on our organisational skills. We often find it hard to respond to feedback as most people dislike being criticised. We need to learn to actively reach out and request feedback in the moment to help track our own progress. Take on this constructive criticism - they are giving us feedback to help us to develop and improve in areas where we may fall short. If we want our leadership skills and knowledge to grow, we must commit to continuously learning. No matter how uncomfortable we might be while listening to feedback.

The ability to master how you see yourself along with how you are seen by others is crucial for you to target areas for improvement and enables you to change how you interact with yourself and others.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Once you have figured out how and why you feel a certain way you can take it to the next level. Self-management or self-regulation is your ability to use your awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and direct behaviour positively. It is about managing your negative emotions, impulses and automatic emotional reactions to situations and people. This is not about trying to obliterate our emotions but more to feel comfortable at being able to regulate them.

When it comes to regulating difficult emotions there are two ways most people respond. They act out or they suppress their emotions. If you act out strong emotions like anger or rage, you will most likely create undesirable consequences in your relationships within the workplace. The consequences of suppressing those big emotions, however, can be even more detrimental as this may only delay these emotions resulting in an unexpected eruption later down the line. To be emotional means to be human so we cannot change that part of ourselves, however we can observe our feelings in real time and understand these feelings objectively. You are not masking or hiding your emotions here but recognizing and regulating them appropriately. When you sense a feeling, taking over a simple technique is to take a moment, breathe and count to ten. This may sound easy but being conscious of this and putting it into action is a great way to allow yourself time to develop a clearer, more rational perspective of the situation. A good example of this is if you are in a meeting and someone interrupts, rather than blurting out, stop and allow your brain some valuable time to catch up.

Another powerful force you can use for self-management is to share your goals publicly with others rather than keeping these to yourself. This is a great motivator and creates an incredible sense of accountability, increasing your chance of accomplishing what you have set out to achieve.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Once we know how to understand our own feelings and are able to manage our own behaviour, we need to know how to read the emotions of others. Have you ever noticed how some people can instinctively know what another person wants; they know how to engage with them in a certain manner – they can read the room.

Actively Listen and Observe Others

A great skill of being socially aware is to actively listen and observe others. Practicing the art of listening is easier said than done. Often during a meeting most of us are thinking about what we want to say next or predicting what others are going to say next or worse still focusing on something else entirely, instead of being present in that moment.

Interactions with colleagues virtually has become ever more prevalent due to the cultural shift of working from home that has increased vastly over the last few years. Face to face interaction is diminishing in the workplace so it is even more important to ensure that communication with colleagues is highly effective. Turning on cameras in meetings can increase your social awareness of others by being able to watch their body language. This face-to-face interaction also helps people stay more focused during meetings. There is no longer an opportunity to respond to emails at the same time.

Practice Empathy

Being able to perceive what other people are feeling and thinking even if you don't feel the same way is vital, especially in this new way of working. Having a lack of empathy by only concentrating on the task in hand to focusing on driving a deliverable forward will lead to team members feeling disengaged. They will no longer be aligned with the overall united goal of the team so the collective success may not be achieved.

Choose the Right Time

Someone who has worked on their social awareness can ensure that they ask the right questions at the right time, but not only that, they ask it while in the right frame of mind and keeping their audience in mind. Just think about how it would go if you were talking with a colleague who is venting about an upcoming deadline. They are concerned about their progress and are showing this through their emotions overwhelming them. As a response, you ask a question regarding another study that is only in the initial start-up phase. This conversation is not necessarily going to go down very well. In this case, the timing, the question, and the frame of mind were wrong. It was the right question and the right time for you to ask the question, however, was entirely the wrong time for the other person.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Though relationship management is the second component of social competence, this skill often taps into your abilities in the first three emotional intelligence skills: self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness. Relationship management is your ability to use your awareness of your own emotions and those of others to manage interactions successfully. Relationships take a lot of time and effort to maintain and most of us just cannot commit. How can we build and maintain them effectively?

Be Open and Curious

Everyone has different personality types, but it is important to understand what other people's motivations and desires are along with their strengths and weaknesses. You can use your self-management skills to choose how open you are and what you share with your colleagues. The benefits of opening up may help people know more about you so there will be less room for them to misinterpret you. Once you have opened yourself up, others around you are more likely to open up themselves. This will not only allow you to learn information that will help you manage the relationship, but the other person will also appreciate the interest shown in them.

Avoid Giving Mixed Signals

We need to make sure what we are saying is clear, it is frustrating to receive mixed signals. Let's say you want to congratulate an employee for their great work, however if you are upset over something that happened earlier in the day, you are not going to give off a sincere message to that employee. The words and the body language are mixed. People trust what they see over what they hear. Over time, this confusion will cause communication issues that will affect your relationships. The ability to identify your emotions through your use of self-awareness and choosing what feeling to express and how to express them through your use of self-management skills will avoid giving off these mixed signals and improve your relationship with this person.

Explain Your Decisions, Don't Just Make Them

As a leader we often feel responsible to make all the decisions and come up with all the ideas of how to tackle a task however being able to flip this round and improve the collaboration within your team by asking them how they would tackle a situation can greatly improve the results of a task by using that creativity of others and channeling it. This involvement in the decision-making process will improve the relationship with other team members by making them feel valued and that their opinions matter. When a decision has been made it remains critical to take the time to explain the why behind the decision and to support anyone involved in that decision through regular and consistent methods of communication that reinforces the role of each person in the decision-making process.

CONCLUSION

Although the term “Emotional Intelligence” has been around for a few years I do not believe this skill receives the attention it deserves. The bias towards technical skills as these are more measurable and tangible still takes the forefront and the lack of awareness alongside lack of comprehensive training of emotional intelligence, I believe leads to this oversight. Emotional Intelligence isn’t just a step-by-step guide, it is an experimental growth process that takes a while to acquire all the skills that goes well beyond the scope of this paper, however I hope some of the core principles detailed in this paper has helped engage you in appreciating its value and by integrating this into workplace means we can adopt a more collaborative, empathetic and successful project delivery. We should all strive to raise our EQ and not just our IQ.

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RECOMMENDED READING

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