



Does Emotional Intelligence exist?

Written by Jacqui Burke of Flourishing People

When I first heard the phrase Emotional Intelligence (often referred to as EI, or as EQ - as opposed to IQ), I asked myself "does this really exist?" It sounded to me like a new piece of jargon designed to sell a few books.

But as I began to understand more about what EI is, I began to recognise examples of people in public life and amongst the people I knew who I could see quite clearly either had or had not a high degree of EI, and to recognise why a high degree of EI is critical to business leaders.

Why is EI important?

Over the last few years considerable research has been conducted into what makes leaders successful.

One of the things that has been found is that as we take on more of a leadership role, our intellect (IQ) and cognitive abilities (e.g. analytical skills, technical skills) become somewhat less critical, and our ability to read and manage situations and relationships becomes more critical. These "softer" skills are no longer just "nice to haves", but are essential to the job.

Consider an example: how often have you come across the extremely competent middle manager or supervisor who, when promoted, seemed totally unable to cope? Usually in this case people are surprised initially ("but he's such a bright chap???"") and then become critical of the appointment. All too often this situation occurs because the manager concerned was promoted because of his high intellect or technical skills, and not because of his EI.

EI in a business leader is more essential than ever in the 21st century because increasingly organisations and their leaders are faced with the following challenges:

- We need to improve the ability of people to work effectively in teams, as we constantly restructure our organisations to make them more productive
- We wish to attract, retain and motivate really good people at a time when the pool from which we are seeking to pull in these people is shrinking
- The rapid pace of change relies on people's ability and willingness to constantly accept and embrace change
- The breakdown in respect for traditional authority, particularly amongst younger people, means that people can only be led if they wish to follow
- The increasing globalisation of businesses through mergers and acquisitions creates political and cultural challenges, which only the most emotionally intelligent leaders will manage positively.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

The phrase Emotional Intelligence has been used by several writers and researchers over the past few years. In particular, Daniel Goleman, whose book Emotional Intelligence is well worth a read, defines the five key elements that make up EI as outlined below (1):

Self management

- *Self awareness* - the ability to recognise and understand your moods, emotions and drives, as well as their effect on others
- *Self regulation* - the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods, and to think before acting
- *Motivation* - a passion to work, for reasons that go beyond money or status, and to pursue goals with energy and persistence.

Relationship management

- *Empathy* - the ability to understand the emotional make up of other people and to treat people according to their emotional reactions
- *Social skills* - proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, by finding common ground and building rapport.

Emotional Intelligence exists where these five elements are present and are well developed.

You might like to pause at this point and work through the following fun exercise to help to build your understanding of EI.

Consider a few public figures (eg Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, John Prescott, Diana Princess of Wales, the Duke of Edinburgh, Sven Goran Ericson, Terry Venables etc).

- *How emotionally intelligent are they?*
- *What is it about their behaviour that supports your view?*
- *Do other people agree with you?*

Next consider the managers and leaders in your working life (and perhaps people in your personal life too) and ask yourself the same questions.

And finally take a step towards growing your own self awareness by asking the same questions about yourself.

Growing your Emotional Intelligence

So if EI is so critical, should we all be attending courses on how to become emotionally intelligent? Well, the answer is probably "no". But not because EI can't be developed or grown.

EI can't be taught in the traditional classroom based environment because it is about emotion. Research into the ways that our brains are wired up tells us that one part of our brain control ideas and thoughts (the neo cortex), and that a completely different part of our brain controls emotions (the limbic brain). Traditional training interventions are designed to stimulate the neo cortex but usually do very little for the limbic brain.

The limbic brain is stimulated by experiences and it is our reactions to these experiences that enables learning to take place. Therefore growing EI relies on experiential learning, where we experience things, and then interpret and make sense of the experiences, and react accordingly.

Each of us therefore has the ability to acquire EI, but it is likely that some of us will find that it comes to us more naturally than others, because of our personality. Some of us will find that we need a helping hand; that we need someone to work along side us to help us to become more self aware, to make sense of our experiences and to consider our reactions to them.

So growing EI is not a quick fix, neither is it an easy ride. And it can't be taught on a course. It relies on "motivation, extended practice and feedback" (1). Developing EI means that old habits and patterns of behaviour will need to be broken and replaced with new ones. And anyone who has ever given up smoking will know that the physical effects of nicotine withdrawal fade quickly, but that the biggest challenge is getting into the habit of not being a smoker.

Some practical steps

So here are some thoughts on some practical steps that you can take to help you to begin to grow your EI.

Mirror, mirror on the wall

Becoming more self aware is quite difficult for some of us. We find it hard to step outside of ourselves and see ourselves as others see us. So consider using a range of tools to help you to do this. These could include:

- 360 degree feedback
- Psychometric assessments
- Asking someone you respect for some honest feedback.

Find a role model

We need to ensure that we have a range of experiences to learn from. As we cannot always rely on life to throw at us all of the experiences that we need, it can often be extremely valuable to identify a role model into whose experiences we might tap. See how they handle situations. A good way of working with this person might be to invite them to act as your mentor.

Get a coach

Coaching to help managers to grow their EI is highly effective, because it is:

- Individually tailored - focused on the individual manager's needs for growth in particular areas
- Can be combined with psychometric assessment such as the MBTI and 360 degree feedback to raise self awareness
- Will establish clear goals and objectives to promote motivation
- Encourages practice, and supports this by regularly reviewing performance to reinforce what is working
- Provides opportunities for reflection, again raising self awareness and encouraging self regulation
- Is regular rather than a one off event providing the feedback and ongoing reinforcement required.

In an ideal world this sort of developmental support should come from our line managers. However, the reality is that line managers rarely have the time to commit this level of support to an individual, and often lack the skills to support them in this way. And so this is why many organisations are turning to external coaches and mentors as a way of building the leadership capability of the organisation.

Whether you chose to find support or to grow your own EI through practice and with good feedback from colleagues and peers, there is nothing to stop the motivated manager from becoming emotionally intelligent and reaping the rewards gained from more positive working relationships.

Ref (1) What makes a leader? by Daniel Goleman (published by Harvard Business Review Nov/Dec 1998)

Published by T&C News 2003