



What is Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Why Does It Matter?

Wherever people with emotional intelligence are, they make a difference. They have the skills and ability to influence and inspire others, manage relationships and navigate social networks.

In this article, we explore the powerful effect EQ has on an organization and the results it produces.

Mary Jane Conway-King

Emotional Intelligence & Continuous Improvement

by: Sheila Julien, Senior Associate

Emotional intelligence is the phrase used to describe the ability to identify, use, understand, and manage emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict. There are several competencies that are sometimes grouped into four major components:

- **Self-awareness** – You recognize your own emotions and how they affect your thoughts and behavior; know your strengths & weaknesses; have self-confidence.
- **Self-management** – You're able to control impulsive feelings and behaviors; manage your emotions in healthy ways; take initiative; follow through on commitments, and adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Social awareness** – You can understand the emotions, needs, and concerns of other people, pick up on emotional cues, feel comfortable socially, and recognize the power dynamics in a group or organization.
- **Relationship management** – You know how to develop and maintain good relationships, communicate clearly, inspire and influence others, work well in a team, and manage conflict.

Research shows that organizations led by people with high emotional intelligence tend to *“have climates in which information sharing, trust, healthy risk-taking, and learning flourish. Low levels of emotional intelligence create climates rife with fear and anxiety.”* Fearful employees may produce a lot in the short term, but over the long run, quality and productivity suffer.

Leaders must be attuned to their own moods and their effect on the emotions of others because emotions are predispositions to actions.

For example:



This Emotion May Predispose one	To...
Anger...	Inclination to punish, inflict pain or see justice
Feeling Overwhelmed...	Paralysis
Resignation...	Check out
Sadness...	Withdraw, seek solitude
Fear...	Fight or flight, violence or silence

Our actions drive our level of accomplishments. In this way, our emotions can have a powerful impact on results. Not only do people with low EQ lead to a less effective workplace and CI teams, they actually cause operational problems that others must solve. Silo mentality and lack of inquiry and listening create sub-optimal processes and impaired results.

Similarly, the level of EQ on a process improvement team affects how much information sharing, how much inquiry, and even how creatively the team will exercise. A team that is emotionally in step has more drive, more commitment, and both aspires to, and achieves greater things. High EQ leads to better listening, and thus to better learning, to new insights and better solutions.

How Do We Use Our Recognition of EQ Within Our Organization?

EQ is applied extensively by leaders who want to effect positive change and to institute a culture of Continuous Improvement. Implementing an improvement or two can be accomplished with an engineer; creating a culture of continuous improvement requires a resonant leader who can communicate a vision, inspire action, drive out fear, motivate truth-telling, resolve conflicts, and create a safe place for people to exercise a passion for high quality, highly efficient work.

Because of their ability to align and motivate people around a common vision and plan, emotionally intelligent leaders are very valuable in organizations desiring to create continuous steady improvement.

Renewing

In his class at Case Western Reserve University ([now available free on Coursera.org](http://now.available.free.on.Coursera.org)), Richard E. Boyatzis, pioneering researcher into leadership and emotional intelligence, teaches that it is not sufficient to have Emotional Intelligence. Even leaders who are naturally gifted with a great deal of EQ can deplete their reserves through the stress of their roles and responsibilities. Boyatzis maintains that leaders must renew themselves, and that research indicates four methods that can restore a leader's emotional strength and ability to resonate with an organization: Compassion, Mindfulness, Playfulness, and Hope.

Practicing compassion, especially in a way that is unconnected with one's responsibilities tends to recharge the brain and its emotional stores. Examples of this might be coaching children's sports team or a boy scout troop, building or restoring homes. Compassion at the office is also helpful, but Boyatzis says that compassion not connected to a self-interested objective is especially powerful.

Mindfulness, spending some period of time centered in the present, emptying the mind of future plans, past regrets, obligations, other places and times, is a powerful method of rejuvenation. He believes leaders need some meditative time at least twice a day. Prayer is often very meditative. Conscious meditation methods or yoga can help to restore one's depleted emotional intelligence.



Playfulness and hope are the last two powerful tools for renewing one's emotional intelligence. Taking some time each day to practice hopefulness and optimism is very helpful to leaders who want to become and stay resonant with the organization. And finally, playfulness, laughter, and good-humor also help to restore levels of emotional intelligence.

How Can EQ Be Developed By Those of Us Not Born with High EQ?

We could all identify people we have known who seem to have a natural high EQ. These are people who resonate with us, create a positive vision, motivate us to work together to achieve great things. They communicate effectively; we like to be with them; they inspire trust. We could also identify some people who were just terrible at EQ – who constantly create dissonance and conflict, who inspire people to go to great lengths to avoid working with them.

Are we predestined to live out our lives with the EQ we have today? The research says, No. In fact, researchers tell us that EQ often grows throughout one's life, and can also be effectively taught.

Five Steps To Personal Change

According to Richard Boyatzis, the research says that emotional intelligence and leadership skills can be taught. Drawing on Intentional Change Theory (ICT), he describes the five steps to the type of personal change required in order to increase emotional intelligence. Intentional Change Theory holds that change, to be sustainable, must be intentional. Interestingly, these steps are not dissimilar to steps required for organizational change. The requirement is a desire for change; without that, no sustainable improvement is possible. People with no interest in developing EQ will not do so, but if they are motivated to change, the following steps will help them.

1. Identify the ideal self

In a way, this is analogous to imagining the future state of an organization – what it would look like without defects, rework, misalignment of work and requirements, etc. – but the ideal self is much more personal. One person's ideal self, building on his or her core identity and aspirations, will be different from another's ideal self. Personal change starts with envisioning the ideal self – the way one would like to be, to work, and to be perceived, but this is much more personal. This has three elements:

- Awareness of one's strengths
- An image of the desired future, and
- A sense of hope that the desired future is attainable

Insight into the ideal self is not always straightforward. One might simply extrapolate a trend of the present instead of envisioning a truly desired future self. Talking about aspirations with trusted friends or mentors can help. But identifying a clear picture of the future self one wishes to be is a foundational step in Intentional Change Theory.

2. Identify the real self

Where is one, relative to one's goals today. This step is not as easy as it sounds. In "[Primal Leadership](#)" Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee report, *"We found that an alarming number of leaders do not really know if they have resonance with their organizations. Rather they suffer from CEO disease; it's one unpleasant symptom is the sufferer's near-total ignorance about how his mood and actions appear to the organization. It's not that leaders don't care how they are perceived; most do. But they incorrectly assume that they can decipher this information themselves. Worse, they think that if they are having a negative effect, someone will tell them. They're wrong."*

The greatest challenge is to see oneself as others do. Using multiple sources of feedback can be



very useful. Many organizations use 360 reviews for all individuals in management positions. However, the self-assessments are customarily inflated because it is the start of negotiation position. [Boyatzis uses 360 reviews to measure the correlation between EQ and operating results, but he says they throw away the self-assessments as “they are largely delusional.”] Identification of the actual self requires honest and objective feedback. Behavioral feedback (such as video) and psychological tests can also help.

3. Develop a learning agenda

In contrast to the stream of to-dos and complying with agendas of others, the learning agenda is development focused. In [Leadership Development from a Complexity Perspective](#), Boyatzis says that “a person often needs a type of permission to let go of old habits and try new ones.” A learning agenda provides that type of structure for exploration and learning.

4. Experimentation and Practice

The fourth step is to practice, look for feedback, and practice again. A consultant, coach or mentor should help the individual who has embarked on intentional change to find safe settings to practice the characteristics of the effective leader he or she envisions.

5. Helping relationships

Coaches, mentors, guides are very helpful to someone aiming to transition to the ideal self through practicing greater EQ and inspirational leadership.

No matter where we are in our journey toward Continuous Improvement, Emotional Intelligence is an essential tool in our tool kit.

Additional Resources:

[Find Your Courage](#) by Margie Warrell

[Emotional Intelligence](#) by Daniel Goleman

[Fierce Conversations](#) by Susan Scott

[Working with Emotional Intelligence](#) by Daniel Goleman