

Emotional Intelligence: Can It Be Taught?

By Golnaz Sadri

Research shows that training for emotional intelligence is not only possible, but can be very effective when you consider each of its dimensions in the design.



Emotional intelligence (EI) has generated a great deal of attention in recent years. Many researchers and practitioners feel that EI supersedes other forms of intelligence in determining success or failure in jobs requiring high levels of interaction with others (management, leadership, teamwork, sales, or customer service for example). The promising thing about EI is that it can be taught. This article looks at what EI means, why it's important, and how to develop training programs to enhance it.



What is it?

Emotional intelligence (EI) relates to numerous skills, such as the ability to motivate oneself, the ability to regulate one's moods and delay gratification, and the ability to empathize and work well with other people. While there are many models of EI, it essentially relates to four dimensions of skills and behaviors: a person's ability to understand her own behavior, to regulate her own behavior, to understand other people's behavior, and to regulate other people's behavior.



Why it works

The available research on EI is promising to practitioners and to those

engaged in the field of training and development. There is evidence that individuals high in EI are able to recognize, appraise, predict, and manage emotions in a way that enables them to work with and motivate co-workers and subordinates. Managers with high EI show elevated levels of transformational leadership. Teams consisting of members higher in EI perform better than teams with members lower in EI.

Employees are more creative when their team leaders demonstrate self-control against criticism and are more empathetic. EI affects the type of conflict management strategies that people adopt, with individuals higher in EI more likely to use collaborative approaches to resolve conflict. Interestingly, EI is associated with higher levels of leadership effectiveness that surpass other important variables such as personality and cognitive ability.



Guidelines

Training programs targeted at developing EI need to focus on the four dimensions of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, awareness of others, and regulation of others.

Self-awareness. Self-awareness is developed by getting participants to look at themselves. This might include looking at behaviors or asking people to reconnect with their inner values,

talents, and passions. Journaling helps with deeper reflection, getting people to focus on their past experiences, goals, and personal mission. Self-awareness is also developed through completing personality and behavioral questionnaires.

There are a number of measurement tools developed to specifically measure EI—for example, the Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). However, EI training programs will benefit from the inclusion of any measures that focus on raising awareness of different dimensions of the self, both self-report and 360-degree measures. While the specific instrument used may vary, it is always important to pay particular attention to the psychometric properties of each instrument to ensure that the measure adopted has both reliability and validity and will truly strengthen a learning and development program.

Self-regulation. Self-regulation requires that a person observe her own behavior and make changes where necessary. Feedback assists with self-regulation because it identifies the strengths and pitfalls of the individual's particular style and identifies next steps in managing behavior. Group simulations with the generation of feedback embedded as part of the exercise are good feedback-generating devices.

Self-regulation requires that a person set behavior-oriented goals and monitor her progress toward these goals.

Checklist:

- ✓ EI programs need to focus on the following four aspects of behavior: self-awareness, self-regulation, awareness of others, and regulation of others.
- ✓ Self-awareness is developed by getting participants to look at their current behavior.
- ✓ Self-awareness can go deeper and ask people to reconnect with their inner values, talents, and passions.
- ✓ Self-regulation requires a person to change in the face of evidence that a particular behavior is not working.
- ✓ Feedback helps identify the strengths and pitfalls of current behaviors.
- ✓ Increased interaction with others helps promote greater awareness of others.
- ✓ Collaborative goal-setting and good social skills help with regulation of others.

Coaching (where a coach works with a client on a one-to-one basis to raise awareness of the impact specific behavior has back at the workplace) is a useful tool in developing self-regulation.

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Awareness of others. Awareness of others largely focuses on developing empathy. Team simulations (ranging from simple paper-and-pencil exercises to more elaborate outdoor activities) help raise awareness of others. When paired with group reflection at the completion of the team simulation, these exercises help build awareness of others and the effects of one's behavior on the group.

One simple way to generate feedback is through a round-robin exercise in which each group member asks the other group members for feedback on

specific aspects of her behavior (for example, "Do you see me as a person who dominates the group discussion?").

Regulation of others. Regulating the behavior of others relies on collaborative goal-setting and the use of effective social skills to guide subordinates toward goal accomplishment. Motivating goals are believable to the individual for whom the goal is set, energizing, and specific, rather than general and timed (captured by the acronym *BEST*). Social skills are enhanced through group simulations and teambuilding, where group members work cooperatively to analyze the task aspects of their work as well as the interpersonal processes occurring within the group.



EI is an important determinant of work performance, and research shows that EI can be enhanced through training. For example, one study compared the performance of financial advisors working under managers who received emotional competence training against managers who did not receive the training. Advisors who worked for a trained

manager were able to grow their businesses at a higher rate than advisors working under a manager who did not receive the training.

Programs aimed at developing EI need to target the EI dimensions of self-awareness, self-regulation, awareness of others, and regulation of others. Trainers should develop programs focused on each individual EI competency. For example, the top training priority for one group of individuals might be developing self-awareness; for another, it may be improving self-regulation.

Assessing the priority level of each competency for the particular training group is an important preprogram step. This can be accomplished by brainstorming with potential participants or having them complete a valid and reliable EI instrument before the trainer develops a particular workshop or development program.

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Resources:

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- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books
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- Mayer, J.D., Salovey, P., and Caruso, D.R. (2002). *Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) User's Manual*. Toronto, ON: MHS
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