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Emotional Intelligence

Emotions, A Definition

According to the Oxford English Dictionary **emotion** is any agitation or disturbance of mind, feeling, passion; any intense, powerful or excited mental state.

The word **emotion** comes from the Latin verb *motere*, which means *to move away*. This implies that all emotions are, in essence, impulses to act.

Basic universal emotions, recognized by people in cultures around the world:

- 🌀 **Anger**: when we are angry, blood flows to our hands, our heart rate increases and adrenaline creates a strong pulse of energy, preparing our body for confrontation
- 🌀 **Fear**: when we feel afraid, survival responses are activated, blood goes to the muscles of our legs, making it easier to flee and our brain triggers hormones that put our body on general alert, freezing it for a moment to gauge whether hiding might be a better reaction
- 🌀 **Happiness**: when we are happy, our brain inhibits negative feelings and increases energy, offering our body readiness and enthusiasm
- 🌀 **Love**: when we experience love, our body generates a general state of calm and contentment, promoting cooperation and bonding

- 👁️ **Surprise:** when we are surprised, more light strikes the thin, light-sensitive layer located at the back of our eyes, offering us more information and making it easier to concoct the best plan of action
- 👃 **Disgust:** revulsion protects us from what may be harmful. The facial expression of disgust is the original attempt to close our nostrils against a noxious odor.
- 😞 **Sadness:** when we feel sad, our energy and enthusiasm drop, slowing our body's metabolism down to adjust to significant loss

Emotions are deeply rooted adaptive responses that have helped human beings survive, connect, learn and grow throughout evolution.

Emotional Intelligence, A Definition

Emotional intelligence (EI), also known as Emotional Quotient (EQ), is the ability to recognize, understand, manage and work constructively with emotions in us and in others. It uses emotional information to guide our thinking and behavior, decision-making and relationships.

Head and Heart, Friends or Enemies?

Our emotions are essential guides in life. They steer us through challenges and tasks too important to leave to our intellect alone. These include facing danger, painful loss, persisting toward a goal despite frustrations, bonding with a mate or building a family. The more intense the feeling, the more the

dominant emotion will guide our response. A healthy functioning, however, depends on cooperation between emotions and intellect. The goal is not for emotion to dominate reason, nor for logic to suppress emotion, but for both systems to work together in balance. When this cooperation functions well, emotions inform thought while thought helps regulate emotion.

The Birth of the Thinking Brain

Our brain has grown from the bottom up (brainstem) with its higher centers as refinements of the lower. The *root brain* – also called the **Emotional Mind** – is the primitive brain that regulates the body's basic functions, such as breathing, heartbeat and basic reflexes. It ensures survival and is related to instinctive emotional responses. From the root brain emerged the emotional centers from which evolved the *thinking brain*, also called the **Rational Mind**, the rational and reflective centers associated with language, planning and abstract thought. This means that the Emotional Mind was there long before the Rational Mind, but the latter allows for greater nuance, self-reflection and a conscious regulation of emotion.

Because the emotional systems evolved earlier, emotional reactions are often faster and more immediate than rational thought. Our higher, emotional centers look to the root brain in crucial matters of the heart, but they also influence our centers for thought.

Ultimately, emotions are not obstacles to rationality, but essential contributors to wise decision-making. Intellect works

at its best with Emotional Intelligence, harmonizing head and heart.

According to research IQ contributes about 20% to the factors that determine life's success and 80% are factors that range from social class to luck and Emotional Intelligence makes the difference.

Inter vs. Intra

Among the many forms of intelligence that shape human functioning, some of the most important are those connected to our inner world and our relationships with others.

Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand and respond to other people and **intrapersonal** intelligence refers to self-knowledge and the ability to understand our own inner life. They both form the essential foundation for Emotional Intelligence. In everyday life, success often depends less on abstract intellect than on practical emotional and social skills such as empathy, communication, emotional awareness and the ability to recognize subtle interpersonal cues.

The **4 components** of Interpersonal Intelligence:

1. **Leading**

The skill of initiating and coordinating the efforts of a group of people.

2. **Mediating**

Preventing conflicts or resolving those that come up by negotiating solutions.

3. Empathy and connecting

The art of entering easily into personal relationships or to recognize and respond fittingly to people's feelings and concerns.

4. How others feel

Being able to detect and have insights into people's feelings, motives and concerns, that can lead to easy intimacy or a sense of connectedness.

The 5 pillars of Emotional Intelligence

1. Self-awareness

The ability to recognize emotions as they arise and understand how they influence perception, behavior and decision-making.

2. Emotional Regulation

Building on self-awareness is emotional regulation, the capacity to respond appropriately to emotions rather than impulsively.

3. Self-motivation

- 🌀 directing emotional energy toward a meaningful goal supports mastery and creativity
- 🌀 delaying gratification and remaining focused despite frustration or setbacks promote accomplishment
- 🌀 being able to get into the flow enables outstanding performance

4. Empathy

The more aware we are of our own emotional states, the more capable we become of recognizing emotional signals

in others. Empathy strengthens connection, cooperation and compassion and plays an important role in professions like teaching, management and sales.

5. Relational Skills

The art of managing emotions in others allows us to navigate interactions and social situations with grace. This ability supports leadership, trust and understanding.

Self-awareness

People differ greatly in how they relate to their own emotions:

🌀 Unconscious

We are engulfed by our emotions and helpless to escape them because we lack thinking perspective.

🌀 Accepting

We accept our moods and we don't try to change them.

- 🌀 Good moods (happy people)

- 🌀 Bad moods (depressed people)

🌀 Conscious

We are aware of the moods as we are having them and can get out of them sooner because of healthy boundaries, a healthy mind and a positive outlook on life.

Much of our emotional life operates below conscious awareness, but emotions often build gradually beneath the surface before becoming fully conscious. Self-awareness, the keystone of Emotional Intelligence, helps bring them into our awareness before they spiral into impulsive behavior.

Managing our emotions does not mean suppressing them. Instead, it involves understanding emotional signals and responding proportionately.

Steps to mastering impulses:

- 🌀 Stop, physically calm down and think
- 🌀 State the problem and how you feel
- 🌀 Set a positive goal
- 🌀 Think in terms of solutions
- 🌀 Consider the consequences
- 🌀 Choose constructive responses

Anger

Adults can have some say in how long an emotion will last. We can temper anger by undermining the convictions that are fueling the anger in the first place. Physically cooling down also allows us to confront our anger in a more constructive or assertive manner.

How?

1. **Challenge the thoughts** that trigger moderate surges of anger. The earlier in the anger cycle (before the anger is acted on), the more effective. One way to do so is to write hostile thoughts down so they can be reframed and reappraised.
2. **Cool off bodily** and wait out the adrenaline surge in a setting where there are no further triggers for anger by seeking a pleasant distraction, like a long walk in nature, deep breathing or muscle relaxation.

Prerequisite is to stop the angry train of thought by engaging our mind and body in a positive way to calm down our nervous system and reduce emotional escalation.

Mood-lifters

Mood can also be influenced through intentional actions:

- 🌀 Engineering a small triumph or easy success (tackling some long-delayed chore around the house)
- 🌀 Cognitive reframing (seeing things differently)
- 🌀 Helping others in need (volunteer work)
- 🌀 Turning to a transcendent power (praying or meditating)

Emotional Intelligence and Relationships

In an intimate relationship one overall strategy to resolve conflicts is to cultivate a couple's shared Emotional Intelligence to work things out.

The dynamics of a healthy conflict:

🌀 Calm down

Take a break from each other (time-out) during a fight. That gives the body the required time to recover from flooding emotions, allowing both sides to calm down.

🌀 Transform the Inner Dialogue

We sometimes see ourselves as completely blameless, powerless or unfairly attacked, while viewing the other person entirely as the problem or aggressor (= innocent-victim thoughts) or we become convinced that

we are morally right, while the other person is wrong, unfair or unjust (= righteous-indignation thoughts). By challenging these thoughts we begin to become free of their hold. Reframing them opens up the possibility of change and a positive resolution.

Connecting Communication

Conflicts become destructive when criticism attacks a person's character rather than addressing a specific behavior or issue. Defensiveness, contempt and emotional withdrawal can gradually erode connection. Empathic listening is a skill that keeps people together, because then we are able to hear the main message: a demand for attention to be paid to an important issue. Validating our partners' feelings through emotional attunement prevents discussions or grievances from escalating into fights. Non-defensive speaking centers around keeping what is said to a specific complaint, expressing one's feelings and offering a constructive alternative.

Respect and love disarm hostility in relationships.

Practice

If a response is practiced so that it has become automatic, it has a better chance of finding expression during emotional crisis.

Emotional Intelligence within relationships is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to navigate conflict without destroying the connection.

Emotional Intelligence and the Workplace

Emotional Intelligence also plays an increasingly important role in professional life. Leadership, teamwork and organizational effectiveness depend heavily on communication, emotional awareness and interpersonal skill.

There are **3 practical uses** of Emotional Intelligence in the workplace:

1. Being able to air grievances as **helpful critiques**

Feedback is the lifeblood of any organization. It gives people the information essential to keep their efforts on track through fine-tuning, upgrading or redirecting. How criticism is given and received goes a long way. Destructive criticism provides neither a chance to respond nor any suggestion of improving. Constructive critique holds out the hope of doing better and suggests the beginning of a plan for doing so.

The art of critique:

- 🗣️ **Be specific:** say what the person did well, what was done poorly and how it could be changed
- 🗣️ **Offer a solution:** point to deficiencies that need attention and ways to fix the problem to open the door to possibilities and alternatives the person did not realize there were
- 🗣️ **Be present:** do this face-to-face and in private to allow the person receiving it to respond or clarify
- 🗣️ **Be sensitive:** be attuned to the impact of what you say and how you say it to the person at the receiving end. Allow the receiving person to take a

step back to absorb the difficult message, see criticism as valuable information and work together with the critic to solve the problem.

2. Creating an atmosphere in which **diversity is valued**

The work floor is getting increasingly diverse and cultural diversity should be seen as a competitive advantage. Stereotypes, however, are sometimes very tenacious and self-confirming and therefore slow to change, but we can definitely do something about them. Emotionally Intelligent people exhibit perspective-taking (understanding the pain of the victim), encouraging empathy and tolerance.

3. **Networking** effectively

Teams are becoming the work unit. They have a group IQ that will determine how well they accomplish their task. Emotional IQ, however, will make a greater difference and social and internal harmony are key in that process. Cultivating good relationships means maintaining a reliable network for having unanticipated problems handled quickly and efficiently. Organizational savvy also includes coordinating efforts, building consensus, perspective-taking, persuasiveness, promoting cooperation and taking initiative.

Key Takeaway

Emotions are not weaknesses to overcome, but essential dimensions of human intelligence. Emotional awareness influences perception, memory, relationships, motivation, decision-making and physical health. When emotions overwhelm awareness, they can distort judgment and narrow perspective. When emotions are understood and regulated constructively, they become powerful allies that support resilience, empathy, cooperation and growth.

Emotional Intelligence is not a single skill, but an ongoing developmental process involving self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, motivation and social understanding. These capacities shape not only individual well-being, but also the quality of relationships, families, workplaces, schools and society as a whole.

True intelligence involves not only the ability to think clearly, but also the ability to understand, guide and work wisely with emotion.



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