

# Emotional intelligence

- 1. Emotional intelligence defined ..... 1
- 2. Emotional intelligence competencies ..... 1
- 3. Learning and developing emotional intelligence ..... 9
- 4. Developing emotional intelligence in others ..... 11
- Version control ..... 12
- References ..... 13

# 1. Emotional intelligence defined

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to accurately perceive and manage emotions – both one’s own as well as those of others. As the basis for a number of leadership skills, emotional intelligence is a powerful facilitator of good leadership and a trait that distinguishes outstanding leaders, trumping IQ and technical skills.<sup>1</sup>

While to some extent an innate attribute, emotional intelligence is mostly formed through life experience as well as deliberate practice and so can be developed and enhanced at any point in one’s career. Leaders are not born but made – they gradually acquire the skills they need.<sup>2</sup> Learning EI is very different from learning analytical or technical skills, however. While the latter can be quickly learned by merely reading a book or attending a seminar, developing EI requires sustained practice and repetition. This is because, at their most basic, EI competencies are learned habits. Developing EI, therefore, means unlearning old and learning a set of new habits.<sup>3</sup> While enhancing one’s EI does take time, it is well worth the effort. Organisations are increasingly moving towards EI assessments in their hiring, appraisal, and promotion decisions.<sup>4</sup> Being intelligent about emotions is also a powerful enabler of a satisfying personal life.

Emotional intelligence is made up of four competencies – two personal and two social<sup>5</sup>:

- Self-awareness – the ability to read and understand one’s own emotions, moods, and drives as well as their effect on self and others.
- Self-regulation – the ability to control one's emotions and feelings in tense moments, redirect any disruptive impulses and act in an intentional way.
- Social awareness – the ability to read and take into account the emotions of others.
- Social skill – the ability to treat people according to their emotional makeup and to guide them in the desired emotional direction.

The four competencies are closely intertwined. Self-awareness enables both self-regulation and social awareness. In order to effectively control one’s emotions, one has to first be aware of them. Similarly, to be able to read the emotions of others, it helps to first understand one’s own. Self-regulation and social awareness are, in turn, the basis for the development of strong social skills.

The four competencies, the way they contribute to one’s leadership potential, and how they can be practised in everyday situations are described below. Assessing, developing, and enhancing emotional intelligence in self and others is covered in the sections that follow.

## 2. Emotional intelligence competencies

### 2.1 Self-awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to know how one is feeling and why and to understand the impact these feelings have on one’s own behaviour and performance as well as how they affect others.

Attuned to what feels right, self-aware people are able to act in a deliberate way. They use the understanding of their values, drives, preferences and aspirations as well as strengths and weaknesses to guide them towards pursuits they both find motivating and ones they are likely to succeed in. They thus rely on self-knowledge in their decision making when faced with choices about what direction to take and then use that self-knowledge to motivate themselves towards achieving their chosen goals.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, self-aware people recognize that strong emotions and feelings have the propensity to guide towards certain behaviours which may or may not be effective. This often happens in an almost automatic way, without much thoughtful consideration given to the resulting behaviour. Given this causative link, self-knowledge is an important first step on the way towards highly effective leadership. Conscious awareness of one's emotions and feelings makes it possible to notice what type of behaviours these tend to guide one towards. Equipped with this understanding, one can then self-regulate, i.e. decide if one's habitual behaviour is most appropriate given the situation and, if not, choose a better way to respond.

Finally, noticing how one feels as well as the link between one's emotions and one's behaviour is a prerequisite for one's ability to infer the emotional makeup of others from their behaviour, i.e. for social-awareness. One is less likely to understand the emotions of others if one is not good at understanding his or her own first.

Self-awareness is highly important in the workplace:

- By bringing to one's attention thoughts about what one finds motivating and inspiring, self-awareness helps drive one's passion for work and boosts the satisfaction one derives from it.
- With access to intuitive feelings, one can make better decisions than one could if one were to rely solely on conscious reasoning – one can tap into the reservoir of life wisdom accumulated in the parts of the brain which can only be accessed indirectly via a gut feeling.<sup>7</sup>
- Self-awareness aids self-development and career progression. Understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, one can seek out work experiences which both play to one's strengths and also create an opportunity to build up new skills needed to take on the desired future assignments.
- Self-awareness increases one's effectiveness at work. The ability to realistically assess organisational capabilities and expertise leads to accurate judgement calls – pursuing suitable business opportunities, arriving at accurate estimates of time and effort required and knowing when to ask for help.<sup>8</sup>

One becomes more self-aware by engaging in activities which help one bring into the open and understand one's emotions, feelings, values, motivations, preferences and aspirations as well as one's strengths and weaknesses.

To become more self-aware:

- Pay attention to your emotions and feelings – either at various points during the day or during emotionally charged events. Can you precisely name the emotion and the corresponding feeling? What caused them? What behaviour are they guiding you towards?
- Clarify your values, motivations, preferences and aspirations. What are your personal and social goals? What professional conduct and personal competence principles do you uphold?
- Understand your strengths and weaknesses. Consider the roles you held at work and in the community. What did you tend to do particularly well? Where did you need to ask for help?

- Envision your ideal future self. Without regard to any perceived obstacles, if you could be living your ideal life 10 years from now, what would you be doing? Where? With whom?
- Seek feedback from your colleagues, team, manager, friends, and family on how you come across and how self-aware you are. Is there a disconnect between how you see yourself and how others see you? How can you increase your self-awareness with their input?
- Engage regularly in scheduled self-reflection, create a community where you can exchange honest feedback and consider working with a coach if you need an outside perspective.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2 Self-regulation

Leadership effectiveness requires maintaining clarity of direction and sustaining concentrated effort. The leader's ability to remain focused and avoid distractions contributes greatly both to his or her own performance and to the performance of those he or she works with. Emotions are one such source of potential distraction one needs to be aware of. External stimuli may give rise to powerful emotions. These can be either positive (e.g. happiness) or negative (e.g. anger or fear). Positive emotions will often guide towards an effective behaviour. Distress, on the other hand, unless kept in check, can throw one off track. It can overwhelm one's attention and keep one obsessing about the situation that caused it. It can sap cognitive resources and prevent from focusing on the task at hand. It can even give rise to counterproductive reactions one may later regret. Not letting negative emotions control one's behaviour is therefore key to one's effectiveness.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the ability to remain composed and positive makes it easier for the whole group/team to act the same. This is because emotions are contagious – the open-loop nature of the human neural system means that emotions spread between people.<sup>11</sup> This can be often noticed when laughter begets laughter or smiles from others. The mechanism at play here are the mirror neurons in the brain which remain attuned to other people's emotions and, over time, cause one to adopt the emotional makeup of others in our vicinity. That this pattern also holds for negative emotions underlies the importance of self-management not only for oneself but for the whole group/team.

The ability to self-regulate, i.e. control one's emotions in tense moments, redirect any disruptive impulses and act in an intentional way, gives one a competitive edge and contributes greatly to one's leadership potential. It allows one to:

- Drive performance and results – able to focus and avoid distractions, one is more likely to prioritise work that matters most. This aids productivity and facilitates goal attainment.
- Remain open to ambiguity and change – the ability not to feel unsettled and instead see ambiguity and change as opportunities and in a positive light allows one to roll with the changes or even lead the way.<sup>12</sup>
- Enhance our credibility – when one retains composure in testing situations, comes across as thoughtful, patient and attentive, builds a track record of balanced decision making and consistently delivers on one's commitments, one is seen as trustworthy and credible.
- Act with honesty and integrity – good impulse control helps prevent unethical outcomes, which are often the result of impulsive behaviour.<sup>13</sup>
- Maintain a positive outlook – able to keep the less helpful emotions in check, one can focus on the opportunities the future holds and makes it easier for others to adopt a positive outlook as well.

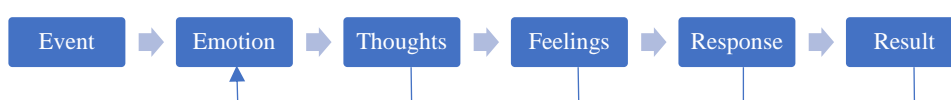
How to control one's emotions then? Emotions are states of arousal triggered by significant events. Negative emotions arise when the brain detects a real or perceived threat and instructs a release of stress hormones to prepare us for a fight or flight response. This mechanism is universal, instinctive and automatic and has been hardwired into us over millions of years of evolution to enhance our chance of survival. Its purpose is to alert us to the threat and move us to action.<sup>14</sup> While useful in a world where one is not at the top of the food chain, fight and flight reactions rarely serve one well in the office. Still, with the brain at times recognising workplace situations as a threat, the question becomes how to ensure we respond effectively.

The good news is that our overt behaviour is ultimately governed by cognitive processes in the brain. The neural system responsible for these processes collects signals from other parts of the brain and decides what to do. This means that even though in the heated moment of a negative emotional arousal the region of the brain responsible for emotions seeks to commandeer our cognitive functions and get us to act first and think later, we still have the ability to veto the fight or flight response and consciously engage in a more effective behaviour instead.<sup>15</sup>

The way to go about this is to control our feelings with our thoughts.<sup>16</sup> Feelings are subjective states of consciousness resulting from an emotion. Unlike emotions however, feelings are personal and vary according to how one chooses to think about a particular event. Importantly, one can change the way one feels by re-examining the interpretation of what happened and the emotions it gave rise to. In short, we can change the way we feel about something by changing the way we think about it. With the benefit of helpful thoughts and feelings about a situation, we can respond to it in a productive way.

Summarising, to control one's negative emotions, one needs to become aware of the negative emotion, thoughtfully control one's feelings, interrupt any default disruptive reaction and replace it with a thoughtful and productive response for a favourable result. This will also have the added benefit of containing the original emotion. Figure 1 illustrates this process.

Figure 1: Achieving favourable results through emotional regulation



Admittedly, some may find it easier said than done. Years of giving in to emotions may have created a habit where a person does not examine his or her emotional states, short circuits the process and reacts in highly emotional ways. Where this is the case, everyone can unlearn such a habit and replace it with a new one, which will allow them to regain control over emotions and respond productively. One way to handle an emotionally charged situation is through the following traffic lights routine<sup>17</sup>:

1. Red – stop: Calm down, take a breath and think before you act.
2. Amber – think: What happened and how do you feel? What are you looking to achieve? What are the ways to get there and the consequences of each? What is the best way? How do you need to feel to successfully implement this best way?
3. Green – act: Develop this feeling and try this best way.

For example, someone who considers to have been treated disrespectfully or unfairly, not to be listened to or heard, or to be held to unrealistic deadlines might lash out.<sup>18</sup> Or, in circumstances that involve ambiguity, change, a misunderstanding, or a difference in opinion, some, driven by anxiety, anger or frustration, may find themselves react in maladaptive ways such as procrastination, brooding or aggressiveness. This may result in non-productive outcomes – delayed projects, damaged relationships, or even diminished career prospects. An emotionally intelligent way to handle such situations would be instead to interrupt the emotional reaction and replace it with a chain of thoughtful consideration, for example as in the traffic lights routine.

How to make it into a habit though? To create a new habit, one needs to understand what cues one's fight or flight response, clearly define the new behaviour, engage in the new behaviour every time one gets cued and reward oneself upon each successful completion.<sup>19</sup> The new habit can be formulated as: "Every time I start sensing a build-up of a negative emotion in me, instead of [your typical fight or flight response], I will complete the traffic lights routine (or another one I prefer) and will reward myself afterwards". In time, after engaging in the new behaviour repeatedly and consistently, a new habit will form – the new behaviour will become the default one and will come effortlessly. Life can be relied on to provide numerous and frequent opportunities for practice, which will take care of the need for repetition. Consistency will hinge primarily on the success rate at noticing early enough that one is succumbing to an emotional reaction, on the ease with which one can recall and implement the new routine in the heat of the moment, and on the extent of motivation one has to develop the new habit.

Only when one notices that one is succumbing to an emotional reaction is one able to prevent it.<sup>20</sup> One can become better at noticing this through self-awareness and also by enlisting the support of others. Self-awareness will allow one to realise that he or she is finding a situation distressing. This can be either because the person will recognize the situation as one that he or she knows tends to cause him or her distress (i.e. is one of his or her hot-buttons) or because he or she will start sensing the physiological effects which the release of stress hormones has on the body. Enlisting the help of others – colleagues, group/team, manager, friends and family – can be of huge assistance as they will be able to signal to the person whenever they notice he or she is getting worked up if the person does not notice this in good time himself/herself.

The ease with which one can recall and implement the new routine will depend on its complexity and on how much thinking it requires during the situation itself. Taking the traffic lights routine above as an example, it is rather straightforward but it does require a lot of thinking. It requires that one think everything through and decide on the best course of action then and there. In the heat of the moment, with emotions high, measured thinking does not always come easy though, and so there is risk of relapsing into one's old habit. Dealing with emotionally charged situations could be made easier if one could do all the thinking in advance before the situation arises. It helps to realise that where an individual is prone to emotional reactions, these are often related to only a handful of hot buttons. Awareness of what these are is of great help, as it allows one to think in advance about how to best handle such situations. That way one will have effective responses ready for the majority of charged situations whenever they arise. For example, an effective response to a hot button could be "Every time a colleague interrupts me with a point of their own, instead of lashing out at them, I will say I'd be curious to hear about their idea and will just ask that they let me finish my point first".

Finally, key to forming a new habit is a strong motivation to do so. It helps to keep in mind the important role emotional intelligence plays in one's development as a leader and the increase in effectiveness it enables. A powerful way to motivate oneself is to develop a mental image of one's ideal future self in 10 years' time and

to think through how emotional intelligence in general and self-regulation skills in particular will help reach that destination.<sup>21</sup> Rewarding oneself after every successful engagement in the new behaviour will also help reinforce the new habit.

We are evolutionarily wired to react in an almost automatic fashion to strong external stimuli, especially to perceived threats. This rather crude system often misfires, however, in an environment where the need to navigate predators one at a time has been replaced with a need to navigate organisational interdependencies in a multi-stakeholder setting. The good news is that through deliberate practice and focused effort everyone can rewire themselves such that the new instinct becomes to respond effectively instead of reacting emotionally.

### 2.3 Social awareness

The ability to empathize with others is a vital emotional intelligence competence. Understanding how others feel is key to our ability to engage with them in a thoughtful and considerate manner. For example, having sensed the prevailing emotion, a leader can help people notice how making progress has led to their greater satisfaction with work or take steps to reassure the group/team. Continuous attunement to the reactions of others allows us to take these into account and adjust the way we engage. As an example, having noticed scepticism in the other person's body language as we explore an idea, we can inquire whether they have any reservations about it and then discuss these in the open. Or, seeing a sudden spark in someone's eye, we can seek to find out if an aspect of the idea we just described would be of relevance to the person and perhaps that way find out about an unmet need we were not aware of. Social awareness thus allows one to come across as caring and approachable and engage in a more meaningful and effective way. Finally, being attuned to the interactions of others helps us identify informal networks that are in place. The understanding of who exerts the greatest influence over matters important to us lets us secure the necessary buy-in for our proposed initiatives thus raising our profile and enhancing our effectiveness in the organisation.

Sensing the feelings of others can be achieved by<sup>22</sup>:

- Situation sensing – what can you find out about what is going on in the environment both by asking expressly and via unspoken signals you can sense?
- Putting ourselves in the other person's shoes – how do they likely feel and what is likely their perspective given the environment or the situation they are in?
- Engaging in emphatic listening – what can you learn when you give the person your full attention and time and adopt a mindset of respect, curiosity, and non-evaluative stance?
- Paying attention to the person's non-verbal cues – what can you infer from their facial expression, tone of voice, body language, or any other external signs of emotion?
- Attuning yourself to how the person feels – what emotions are you able to sense viscerally?

We seek to identify informal social networks of influence and decision making by inquiring about and observing the interaction and co-operation patterns within and between groups and teams. This is in order to pinpoint<sup>23</sup>:

- Opinion leaders – individuals who on account of their unique expertise, access to rare and valuable information or just personality strength wield above average influence. Who shares important updates? Whose opinion is typically sought when a specific subject or matter is discussed? Whose view appears to matter most? Who are people's eyes turning to when this particular topic gets raised in a meeting?
- Power coalitions – groups of individuals who share values, priorities and agendas and typically work together toward common goals and objectives. Who typically participates and contributes to discussions and decisions regarding a particular subject or matter?
- Patterns of influence – patterns of deference in direction seeking and decision making. Who is typically deferring to whom on a specific subject or matter? And they in turn to whom? Your key stakeholders – who are they each most influenced by? Given these patterns, who are then the pivotal people you need to convince?
- Supporters, opponents, persuadables – individuals grouped according to their attitude towards a specific idea or proposal. What are the interests and motivations that affect their positions? How can you use this knowledge to further solidify or win their support?

Social awareness is a key enabler of social skill. It underpins our ability to manage relationships effectively and facilitates a broad range of skills vital to every leader. Specifically, social awareness:<sup>24</sup>

- Makes us better communicators – receptiveness to the other person's emotions and non-verbal cues will help us understand their message more completely.
- Improves needs discovery – being attuned to the feelings and perspectives of clients, colleagues, team members, and other stakeholders makes us more adept at determining their needs.
- Enables conflict resolution – with a better understanding of the other person's needs and concerns, reaching a mutually satisfying solution becomes much easier.
- Helps us influence and motivate – better insight into the needs and drives of others makes it easier for us to find the best way to convince them both individually and as a group.
- Enables organisational intuition – allows us to appreciate and act in line with the norms and values of our group/team and helps us identify social networks and understand their unspoken norms.
- Facilitates cross-cultural dialogue – being attuned to the body-language and emotional expression can help navigate cultural nuances and prevent misunderstandings.
- Supports talent retention – attentive listening and situation sensing allows us to understand what people care about most and identify any concerns early.

## 2.4 Social skill

Social skill is emotional intelligence in action. At its core, social skill is treating people according to their emotional makeup and guiding them in the desired emotional direction. This allows building a foundation for smooth interactions that over time lead to effective relationships. For example, as we approach a colleague to discuss an idea, having become aware of the emotions this is prompting in them, we can either recognise and



appreciate our colleague or alternatively offer them a different way of interpreting our intentions. That way we can get the conversation off to a good start.

Social skill allows us to engage in a meaningful dialogue which leads to a better mutual understanding and a deeper connection. Our attentive listening, where we attune ourselves to all verbal and non-verbal messages from the speaker, allows us to better discern their true needs. It also encourages the other party to adopt the same attentive listening style.<sup>25</sup> Where both sides to a conversation focus on the needs of another rather than their own, a meaningful dialogue ensues and a genuine connection is the result.

Such strong mutual attention, when accompanied by a sense of positivity, can facilitate the emergence of rapport – a friendly and harmonious relationship in which people communicate well and understand each other’s needs and feelings.<sup>26</sup> When we observe people experiencing rapport, we see synchronised gestures, body postures mirroring each other, smiling, nodding and continued eye contact – all achieved spontaneously and seemingly with no effort. Maintaining a positive outlook and intentionally displaying positive emotions – key enablers in the emergence of rapport – play an important role in one’s ability to foster strong relationships in an organisational setting.

Skilful priming of positivity becomes even more important when one realises that the organisational climate explains in part the performance of the organisation as a whole – when people feel good, they work at their best. Leaders, in turn, have significant influence over how that climate evolves.<sup>27</sup> To realize the collective power of a group, leaders will seek to prime positive emotions so as to keep people engaged, motivated, and inspired to achieve. It follows that leaders can meaningfully drive results by establishing a positive work environment and so the emotional actions leaders take matter greatly for organisational success.

Social skill relies on our ability to read the emotions of a person or group and to intentionally display and vary our own in order to manage our relationships effectively. With people taking emotional cues from the leader, he or she helps the group/team interpret situations and events as they unfold.<sup>28</sup> To illustrate, a leader may project excitement as the group/team delivers on an important goal or display a more serious mood in recognition of the circumstances the group/team is facing. He or she thus helps create a collective meaning for the group. This, if initiated from the position of attunement with the group’s existing emotions, helps ensure that people feel heard and understood. The feeling of mutual comfort that results is then a potent foundation for collective learning, creative pursuits, collaboration, and group/team achievement.

The ability to guide people in the desired emotional direction is key to effective relationships. The ability to build and cultivate effective relationships underpins, in turn, a number of vital leadership skills<sup>29</sup>:

- Influencing and persuasion – our ability to influence depends to a great extent on the degree to which we have built effective relationships with those we wish to influence. Can we create a positive environment? Do we listen well? Can we relate our needs to those of another?
- Teamwork and collaboration – cultivating relationships is the essence of teamwork and collaboration. Can we prime positivity? Do we listen well? Can we relate to other people’s goals and priorities? Can we build rapport? Can we influence? Can we inspire?
- Conflict management – managing relationships and emotions is key to effective conflict resolution. Can we listen well? Can we guide a person to a more neutral emotional range? Can we build trust? Can we get other people on board to help us resolve conflict?

- Coaching and mentoring – a foundation of trust and a strong relationship with the coachee or mentee are key enablers of a successful practice. Can you genuinely connect with people? Can you ask good questions and can you listen well? Can you focus on the needs of another?
- Inspirational leadership – the ability to inspire draws on all four emotional intelligence competencies. Can you display emotional stability? Can you build relationships based on trust? Can you excite people with a compelling vision? Can you set the emotional tone?
- Motivating others – Can you create an environment of mutual trust? Can you discern people’s drives and aspirations? Can you help people develop a meaningful vision for the future? Can you project positive energy and provide inspiration?

Those who can and do effectively focus on and engage with others emerge as natural leaders regardless of title or rank.<sup>30</sup> With emotional intelligence being a key facilitator of strong relationships, there is a strong case for developing a balance of strengths across the suite of EI competencies.

### 3. Learning and developing emotional intelligence

With emotional intelligence playing an important role in good leadership, the question becomes how to best go about developing and enhancing it.

The key to mastering EI is to understand that learning EI is very different from learning analytical or technical skills. While the latter rely primarily on understanding and memorisation, EI competencies are rooted in habit formation. Reading a book or attending a seminar will therefore not suffice – developing EI requires sustained practice and repetition until new behavioural habits are formed. Importantly, we use different regions of the brain to learn analytical and technical skills and different when developing EI competencies. While the ‘thinking’ brain learns fast – new analytical or technical skills can be acquired literally overnight, the ‘emotional’ brain is a slow learner – we develop EI over the course of months of deliberate practice.<sup>31</sup> Yet although EI takes longer to learn, the effects are also more durable – once formed, new habits stay with us for years, if not forever.<sup>32</sup>

Being a major undertaking, enhancing EI requires ongoing commitment and sustained motivation. Only when one clearly sees the benefits which EI competencies confer when mastered, will one continue in one’s resolve to put in the necessary effort and practise the new behaviours. That is why the best place to start when developing EI is to create a source of ongoing motivation to keep one going. One such motivator can be an idealized vision of one’s future self – us in 10 years’ time living a perfect life of our choosing, the enabler of which are the EI competencies we resolved to master. Keeping this vision in mind can be a very powerful and sustainable source of motivation in one’s EI pursuits.

Now that we know who we want to become, the next question to ask is who we are today – what is our current real self. What are the strengths we can leverage and which competencies do we need to build up? What is our own assessment of these and what can we learn from the feedback we get from others? Where should our focus lie – which EI competencies are most relevant for our ideal future self? What is getting in our way today and needs addressing so that we can succeed? The way to find out is to engage in self-reflection in the context of the four EI competencies and also to seek feedback from those we work with as well as from friends and family.

Feedback will be most useful if it covers a candid assessment of both our strengths and weaknesses in each of the four areas and when it is provided by all our stakeholder groups, as each of these experiences our behaviour from a different perspective. Importantly, feedback from one's direct reports has been found to be particularly useful in identifying areas of skill which, when developed, will contribute most to one's development as a leader.<sup>33</sup>

Clarity about our real and ideal selves allows us to devise a learning agenda – a practical plan with manageable steps that get us closer to who we want to become.<sup>34</sup> The learning agenda identifies the competencies we need to enhance and within these the specific skills we want to acquire – our learning goals. For example, if we resolved to enhance our social awareness, one of our learning goals might be to become a better listener. For each learning goal, we then identify the habit or habits we need to form to attain the goal. To become a better listener, one habit to develop could be to pay close attention to both verbal content and non-verbal cues throughout the conversation. Another could be to continuously acknowledge the interlocutor with facial expression, nodding, confirming our understanding with “I see” and “I understand” or checking our understanding by rephrasing what the other person is saying and feeling so they can confirm. The way to define the go-to habits is through a combination of learning about effective behaviours from books, magazines and courses, observing colleagues who demonstrate such behaviours, reflecting on what behaviour is likely to be most effective in a given situation, experimenting with various behaviours and assessing the outcomes, and seeking feedback from those who experience our behaviour.

With the go-to behaviours and desired habits defined, we can use everyday situations that arise in our personal and professional life to practise. While the new behaviour will likely not feel natural at first, we will become more comfortable with it over time. With consistent and repeat practice, a new habit will form. When this happens, the behaviour will become second nature and will come effortlessly. To help us engage in the new behaviour consistently, it helps to maintain situational awareness, so that we can notice all opportunities to practise it. Even better, if we can anticipate the situation, we can mentally rehearse our behaviour in advance to be better prepared. Mental rehearsals also contribute to habit formation directly.<sup>35</sup>

When considering learning goals, it helps to realise that a goal will be most effective if we feel passionate about it, if it builds on our strengths and if it is learning rather than performance oriented.<sup>36</sup> The best goals are self-identified rather than imposed on us. We will be more committed to those and will find them more meaningful. The best goals allow us to develop and practise a new behaviour in a way which leverages a strength we already have in another area. To illustrate, such a goal could be set by someone who excels at listening in client meetings but has received feedback that suggests they interrupt and multitask when interacting with colleagues. And finally, the best goals favour gradual improvement over aiming for stellar performance straight away. That way they are consistent with how habits are formed.

Even though developing emotional intelligence may appear to be something one does in isolation, the best results will be achieved when one enlists the support of others. In fact, we can benefit hugely from such support at each stage of our self-development: when exploring our ideal future self, from the feedback on how we come across today, when identifying learning goals that will be most impactful and from a trusting and encouraging environment during the practice itself. Engaging in new behaviours that go against ingrained habits, one is likely to feel unsafe, self-conscious and stressed. This may in turn impede learning and discourage further practice. That is why involving others who will help create an atmosphere where it is safe to experiment with new behaviours and will nudge us back on track if we veer off can be hugely beneficial. At a minimum, we should involve our manager who can provide useful coaching and feedback. Where we know of others who are also working on enhancing their EI, it may make sense to connect with them to discuss our and their learning goals and progress,

give each other feedback and create a supportive learning environment. If we think we would benefit from an outside perspective or from the expertise of someone trained and experienced in helping others develop EI, hiring an external coach is an option to be considered.<sup>37</sup>

With emotional intelligence being a function of lifetime experiences, each of us, having had their own, will have EI competencies developed to a different level.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of the starting point, however, everyone can develop emotional intelligence further at any stage in life. With sufficient practice, everyone can reach mastery in the skills they find meaningful and important. At that point, what used to feel unnatural becomes second nature and effective behaviours require no effort at all.

## 4. Developing emotional intelligence in others

Whether a friend, family member, a colleague or a member in our group/team, we may know someone who could clearly be more effective in their personal or professional life if they were better at noticing and managing their emotions. How can we help them develop their emotional intelligence?

First, the person may not be familiar with the concept or may not even be aware that emotions is something that is getting in their way. If we believe that is the case, we should bring the matter to their attention, say what we noticed about their behaviour, discuss how developing emotional intelligence could improve their effectiveness and encourage them to give it a try.<sup>39</sup> Or, if they are already working towards EI mastery, we should acknowledge the effort and offer our support.

Emotional intelligence is best developed through a five-step process of motivation, skill assessment, learning agenda, deliberate practice and involving others. These steps are explained in the preceding section, and our role will be to help the person complete these by providing coaching and feedback, creating a psychologically safe environment and helping them get back on track, if required.

For one to be able to develop new skills and habits, they need to adopt a growth mindset – a belief that everyone can change if they so resolve and that the way to get there is through persistent effort, continued practice and gradual improvement. Where we sense that the person does not believe they can change or gets discouraged when the new behaviour does not come off immediately, the way to encourage a growth mindset is by demonstrating how similar others succeeded in personal change and by promoting readiness to take on a challenge and willingness to persist in one's effort.<sup>40</sup> When engaging in new behaviours, a supportive environment contributes greatly to one's learning experience. Without it, one could feel self-conscious and find it unsafe to experiment with new approaches. The resulting stress could impede learning and discourage further practice. We will therefore help the person immensely if we can facilitate a psychologically safe environment where new behaviours are welcomed and encouraged and not judged or criticised by others.<sup>41</sup>

As the person continues with their practice, it is important to provide them with coaching and feedback to help them notice the progress they are making and to identify areas for further improvement. It will also often be useful to reinforce the person's growth mindset and encourage continued effort and practice. By facilitating regular feedback from others as well as providing one's own periodic evaluations and assessments, we will help the person guide their efforts and stay the course.

## Version control

No.	Date	Changes
1	Jun 2019	Original version
2	Nov 2020	- Updated the way the terms <i>group</i> and <i>team</i> are used for consistency - Made minor wording changes throughout the guide

## References

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