

Emotional Intelligence



Although there is some dispute about what constitutes human intelligence or human emotion (and how it can be successfully measured), this booklet suggests that the term emotional intelligence draws on two simple concepts: Intelligence — **“applying knowledge appropriately,”** and Emotionally astute (“tuned in”) — what we will term **“applying feelings appropriately.”** Emotional intelligence is driven by two major factors: A person’s basic drive or motivation, **and** the relative structure or flexibility of their thinking about themselves and others. We suggest that “applying knowledge appropriately” is fundamentally about analysis and intuition, “applying feelings appropriately” is fundamentally about experience and expression.

Despite some difference of opinion, research generally suggests that our intellect or reason and our emotions work in close harmony to ensure that our responses are intelligent in a rounded or holistic fashion. This means that the more we use or engage all of our mental faculties to perceive and understand the world around us as well as look for contextual meaning, the more emotionally intelligent we are likely to be.

1

Recognize

The ancient Greeks were the first to think of emotions existing somewhere between the mind and the body: **Love, hate, joy, and anger** are experienced in the mind as psychological processes and in the body as physiological reactions such as increased heart-rate, trembling, or tears.

The ancient Greeks and Hypocrites in particular sought to classify or categorize emotions to make them easier to understand, believing that there are four emotional temperaments, based on the dominance of a particular bodily fluid.

The Greeks believed that every individual possessed one of these four temperaments as a dominant influence on their character. Emotional reactions, they believed could be predicted.

Little of this thinking held much support in terms of systematic or scientific evidence, but the idea of characterizing emotions, styles, or general behavioral 'types' is still appealing, and it prevails to this day. In fact, it still underpins much of the current psychological testing methods that are in common use, including much of the psychometric testing that arguably started with the ideas of Carl Jung and continued with other well-known pioneers of testing such as Eynsenck, Cattell, Holland, Marston, and Myers-Briggs. All of these psychologists built models of human personality that were based on four different style types and blends of thinking and feeling styles.



2

Understand

One subject of debate over the last 100 years has been whether or not individuals are capable of reacting to external stimuli before their rational thought processes are triggered by changed behavior, by changing their physiological state, or by acting differently. On the one side of the debate, scientists such as William James and Carl Lange suggested that emotions always follow a reasoning process (albeit a fast one). In this sense, emotions are only seen to be patterned behavior that has been learned over time.

On the other side of the debate, scientists such as Walter Cannon and Phillip Bard suggested that emotions precede the conscious-reasoning process in order to allow behavior or action to occur quickly, without having to lose precious time in analytical reflection (when danger is present, for example).

This debate still continues to this day, but the general weight of opinion now seems to suggest that these processes occur together or at least in parallel. Emotions are generally believed to be separate, distinct, and describable in their own right, not just set patterns of cognitive thinking.

Of course, many basic emotional reactions are not learned, but are inborn physiological responses like **pain, fear, crying, hunger, sensual and general pleasure, frustration,** etc. These and other emotions like **ecstasy, sadness, irritability, rebelliousness, fear, or sudden episodes of agoraphobia,** can be genetic, hormonal, or even drug-induced (or the response to medication of some kind). As we grow out of early childhood however, certain emotions become associated with particular situations and events, known as a learning process. Many of these associations are not necessarily rational. We fear situations that are not dangerous (like meeting someone or speaking up in public), and we might even get upset about things that cannot be avoided. Sometimes we briefly distrust the opposite sex after we have been rejected by someone.

Despite the difference in opinion about emotion, one issue upon which there is fairly widespread agreement is that **certain emotions are more inbuilt or biological/physiological:** emotions such as fear, pleasure, or frustration. Other emotions are seen to be more cognitive or thought-related — emotions such as guilt or disgust (where some social context must be understood before the emotion can be experienced). If the emotion is more complex, it will take time to learn or appreciate.



3

Learn

Highly emotionally intelligent people can be readily distinguished from those who are not very emotionally intelligent. The differences are potentially many and various, but they can be summarized in three core areas:

1. **The rational context for their feelings**
2. **An openness to feedback**
3. **A capacity to be realistic**

Let's look at each of these briefly in turn.

A RATIONAL CONTEXT FOR THEIR FEELINGS

As we have already suggested, emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to put their feelings into a wider context, and to look for connections and associations between what they are feeling and the way that they behave, talk, and act in general. In a practical sense, this means that they more quickly recognize that natural and common emotions such as happiness, sadness, or anger are part of a sophisticated response process. It will take effort to understand the context in which these emotions are being felt. This will be instinctive on the part of some people, and learned behavior in others. However, in both cases, individuals are looking for the meaning behind their feelings, and not acting blindly.

AN OPENNESS TO FEEDBACK

Although many people understand their feelings and are even able to put them into context much of the time, another key strength of the emotionally intelligent individual is the capacity to talk about their feelings and to accept feedback (some of it brutal or quite candid). Such individuals are happy to discuss their emotional response or reactions, and look for opportunities to gain new angles or perspectives, and to develop a higher level of understanding in the future. They know these things will help them develop and grow over time.

A CAPACITY TO BE REALISTIC

Many of the writers on emotional intelligence (Mayer and Salovey, Goleman, Cooper and Sawaf, etc.) draw the conclusion that emotionally intelligent people have a high sense of self-worth, do not take themselves seriously (and are even relatively light-hearted and easy-going in their character), and are quite realistic about their own personal strengths and weaknesses.

In summary, emotionally intelligent people can be seen to have a realistic view of themselves and an openness about taking steps to continually learn in order to improve. We will explore this conclusion later in this booklet.

