

Human Resource Management Trends and Issues:

Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the Workplace

[James Kierstead](#)

Research Directorate - PSC
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Issue Summary

Over the past several years, the term Emotional Intelligence has received much attention as a factor that is potentially useful in understanding and predicting individual performance at work. This paper examines the roots of the emotional intelligence movement and issues surrounding its application in human resource management.

Background

The term *Emotional Intelligence* first appeared in a series of academic articles authored by John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey (1990, 1993). These publications generated little attention. Two years later, the term emotional intelligence entered the mainstream with Daniel Goleman's 1995 best-seller *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* and subsequent articles in USA Weekend and Time Magazine (October 2, 1995). More recently, Goleman's latest book, *Working With Emotional Intelligence* (1998), has caught the attention of human resource practitioners.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

The concept of emotional intelligence is an umbrella term that captures a broad collection of individual skills and dispositions, usually referred to as soft skills or inter and intra-personal skills, that are outside the traditional areas of specific knowledge, general intelligence, and technical or professional skills. Most of the authors on the topic note that in order to be a well adjusted, fully functioning member of society (or family member, spouse, employee, etc.), one must possess both traditional intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (dubbed EQ). Emotional intelligence involves being aware of emotions and how they can affect and interact with traditional intelligence (e.g., impair or enhance judgement, etc.). This view fits well with the commonly held notion that it takes more than just brains to succeed in life - one must also be able to develop and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. Taken from this perspective, emotional intelligence is nothing new.

According to Mayer and Salovey (1993):

Emotional Intelligence allows us to think more creatively and to use our emotions to solve problems. Emotional Intelligence probably overlaps to some extent with general intelligence.

The emotionally intelligent person is skilled in four areas: Identifying emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions, and regulating emotions.

Goleman (1995) takes a somewhat broader position in describing emotional intelligence. In his writings, emotional

intelligence consists of five factors: Knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships.

Emotional Intelligence at Work

In *Working With Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman applies the emotional intelligence concept to the workplace setting. In this analysis, he argues that the emotionally intelligent worker is skilled in two key areas he presents in his emotional competence framework. These are "personal competence" - how we manage ourselves, and "social competence" - how we manage relationships. Each broad area consists of a number specific competencies, as outlined in the table below. Examples and the complete model (including sub-competencies) are available in Goleman's book, or at the web-site for the [Emotional Intelligence Research Consortium](#), founded by Goleman.

Personal Competence	Social Competence
<p>Self Awareness <i>(of internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions)</i></p>	<p>Empathy <i>(awareness of others feelings, needs, and concerns)</i></p>
<p>Self Regulation <i>(of internal states, impulses, and resources)</i></p>	<p>Social Skills <i>(adept at inducing desirable responses in others)</i></p>
<p>Motivation <i>(tendencies that facilitate reaching goals)</i></p>	

Analysis of the Situation

Is emotional intelligence as important as claimed? Can the concept be successfully applied to human resource management issues? Many popular press articles juxtapose emotional intelligence with traditional intelligence by making claims -- usually attributed to Goleman or others -- such as the following:

"...success at work is 80% dependent on emotional intelligence and only 20% dependent on IQ,"
HR magazine, November 1997.

This claim, which is not unique in the popular press on EI, is somewhat of an overstatement of the potential power of emotional intelligence. This reflects, perhaps, a desire on the part of HR practitioners to find a construct other than intelligence that can be used to further understand and predict performance at work. As shown in the quotes below from Goleman (1995, p. 34) and Mayer and Salovey, there is still much research to be done to determine the meaning of the Emotional Intelligence and to find ways to apply the concept in human resource management.

According to Goleman:

"At best IQ contributes about 20% to the factors that determine life success, which leaves 80% to other forces...No one can yet say exactly how much of the variability from person to person in life's course it accounts for. But what data exist suggest it can be as powerful, and at times more powerful, than IQ."

In the promotional materials for their own emotional intelligence test, the originators of the concept, Mayer and Salovey, provide the following clarification regarding the role of emotional intelligence:

"In some ways, interest in Emotional Intelligence has been due in part to a backlash against claims that general intelligence - IQ - is the key to success. We know that IQ does predict academic achievement and occupational status, but it still only predicts about 20% of personal variation in these areas. Psychologists have yet to understand what predicts the other 80% of success in these areas of life. We believe that Emotional Intelligence is one of the abilities which are related to life success, but we are as yet unable to determine just how important Emotional Intelligence is.

So, where does Emotional Intelligence fit in? Despite popular reports to the contrary, there are few relevant studies on the matter to date. Our best guess is that Emotional Intelligence will make a unique contribution in the 5% to 10% range. It makes sense that Emotional Intelligence plays a role in our friendships, parenting, and intimate relationships. Our research, to date, is just beginning to examine these issues in depth."

Measuring Emotional Intelligence

In his 1995 book Goleman states that there may never be a valid or reliable measure of EI. To validate such an instrument would be a very difficult task given that emotional intelligence is more or less an umbrella concept. However, Goleman, in partnership with the Hay Group consultancy, is in the process of developing a 360 feedback tool to assess the components of EI that apply to the workplace, based on the emotional competencies outlined above. This tool is intended primarily for use in career and personal development, rather than in employee selection. Several other instruments have appeared claiming to provide a measure of EI (the Bar-On EQ-i, Mayer and Salovey's Emotional IQ test, Essi Systems EQ-Map), and claiming to be appropriate for employee selection.

The jury is still out on these tools and others. It is important to note that, there is little validation research available for these instruments. Therefore, claims of utility in the organizational context (from staffing to counselling to downsizing applications) should be viewed with some caution. There is, however, an opportunity and need for research evaluating these instruments with respect to their applicability to the public sector context. It is encouraging that the [Emotional Intelligence Consortium](#), lead by Goleman, is taking steps to address some of the more fundamental research questions surrounding emotional intelligence. The concept may well prove useful in helping to further understand and identify the personal, non-cognitive qualities that will be required of public sector leaders in the future. Additionally, it is also possible that Emotional Intelligence, once better understood, will show a relationship to more generally accepted measures of personality. Indeed, EI may turn out to be a subset of personality that can be assessed by instruments that have already been well validated.

Overall Evaluation

At present, there is little in the way of published, fundamental research that examines either emotional intelligence or its measurement. However, this is a very interesting and potentially powerful area that bears watching. The emotional intelligence movement has some of the earmarks of a fad and is not without controversy. The popular press, if it is any indicator of professional sentiment, suggests that the HR community is generally supportive of the EI concept while the training community is quite sceptical. Personnel psychologist seem mildly curious in EI, noting that the idea is not particularly new. The following quotes from recent articles demonstrate the views of those on both sides of the interest in this topic.

From HR Magazine:

What characteristic most distinguishes star performers from average workers? If you said IQ, you answered incorrectly.

In more scientific terms, EI can be defined as an array of non-cognitive abilities and competencies that influence a person's ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures.

Nov 1997, p. 72

From Training:

According to Goleman, an individual's quotient of emotional intelligence, or EQ, may actually predict success more accurately than IQ. That's a seductive proposition...but it's as full of holes as Swiss cheese.

EQ has a friendlier feel to it - nice guys finish first at last - but it's far from warm and fuzzy. For one thing, attempts to measure it are alarmingly facile.

Jan 1996, p. 8

EQ is a fictitious measure of everything, other than IQ, that helps us get ahead in the world....The term emotional quotient, which conflates EQ with IQ, is fictitious in the sense that no accepted test has been devised to determine a person's EQ. The term EQ came not from scientific research but from an EQ Quiz published in USA Today last year, a fact that speaks volumes about where the interest in EQ is likely to lead.

April 1996, p. 50

From Personnel Psychology:

To what extent is EI of use to managers, teachers, researchers, parents, or the general public? That remains a pressing question. Goleman would have us believe that EI explains almost everything. If that is the case, then perhaps it really explains nothing. As an umbrella concept, it includes many well known psychological constructs that have already been thoroughly investigated.

Autumn 1996, p. 711

Conclusion

The whole area of non-cognitive factors as related to performance at work (e.g., personality, emotional intelligence, creativity, etc.) certainly presents an opportunity for ongoing research by the Public Service Commission. It is broadly recognized that non-cognitive factors are important determinants of work behaviour, especially in a rapidly changing work environment. What remains is to determine which constructs and assessment methods offer value, contribute to merit based staffing, and increase understanding of job performance in the public sector context.

Given the lack of research available to date, it would be premature to integrate specific measures of emotional intelligence in to staffing practices in the federal Public Service. This area of study is not yet developed to the point where it can be used for administrative decision-making. However, most of the emotional competencies proposed by Goleman are not new to human resource practitioners, and have already appeared as elements of various competency profiles that are currently in use.

At a minimum, the emotional intelligence concept is useful for individuals interested in learning about the role of emotions in work and everyday life and how interpersonal relationships affect work and organizational performance, and should prove useful for personal development and insight.

For those interested in further reading on this topic, a list of internet resources is provided below.

[The Emotional Intelligence Research Consortium
http://www.eiconsortium.org/](http://www.eiconsortium.org/)

[Daniel Goleman's Web Site - Emotional Intelligence Services
http://www.geocities.com/~emiq/](http://www.geocities.com/~emiq/)

[American Society of Training and Development - Interview with Daniel Goleman, OCT 1998
http://www.astd.org/virtual_community/td_magazine/](http://www.astd.org/virtual_community/td_magazine/)

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