



“Where knowledge & skills combine”

## Introduction to Emotional Intelligence

The mistake people make when trying to figure out why people do irrational things is to start from the assumption that humans are logical thinking creatures who have emotions – many times when you ask yourself ‘*what was he thinking?!*’ the reason you can never reach a satisfactory answer is this simple assumption. It’s a myth!

Neuroscience shows that the reality is entirely different – humans are in fact emotional creatures who (happen to) think. Our emotional brains (known officially as the ‘*Limbic System*’) are estimated to have evolved more than 400 million years ago – and are not much different in their function today than they were at that time. By contrast, our ‘thinking brains’ (officially the ‘*Neocortex*’) only began to show up in very, very primitive form about 200 million years ago, and only came to resemble our modern brain as recently as 2-3 million years ago.

So, our emotions have quite a head start on our logical capabilities – they have had many millennia to shape our responses to our world and its challenges, and it is still a dominant force in everything we do.

The emotional brain is survival circuitry designed to do nothing more than keep you safe from danger – by driving the well-known ‘*fight, flight, or freeze*’ response. In prehistoric times it provided near instant responses to the existential threat posed by super-predators – allowing us to be running quickly away from a threat before we even had any conscious awareness of the threat’s existence.

It’s not much different now. In your brain today, every stimulus, whether it’s a thought coming from inside your own thinking brain, something done or said by someone else, or any other sensory input from your environment, is first screened by the emotional brain. Simplistically, we can think of the emotional brain as tagging all stimuli as either ‘*Threat*’ or ‘*Reward*’ situations – and we are programmed to quickly distance ourselves from threats and move towards rewards, from pain to pleasure.

Only once the emotional brain has done its screening and tagging does your thinking brain get a look in – with details of the stimuli passed along to it *with the tag from the emotional brain*. Every single thought you have is influenced by your emotions. We use emotions to valence or give weight to our thoughts. Emotions help us to make decisions – to choose from multiple almost identical options. Emotions help us decide whether or not we like people, and emotions decide whether an experience is a good experience, a bad experience, or a neutral experience. In a very real sense every decision we make is an emotional decision – which is later reviewed and very often justified by the thinking brain. The emotional brain gets the first say every time.

This has major implications for understanding our behaviour, and that of others. While our thinking brain tells us what’s going on in the world, and why it thinks it’s going on, our emotional brain tells us how we feel about it – good, bad, or indifferent.

Emotional intelligence is knowing that emotions play a part in every moment of our existence and adapting the way we 'show up' accordingly.



At the core of Emotional Intelligence is **'Self Awareness'** – the ability to notice our emotions and the effect that they are having upon the things we say, the behaviour we deploy, and the decisions we make. The more self-aware we are the more choice we have in how we respond to stimuli – how well we manage ourselves, especially in emotionally charged situations. Daniel Goleman, the so-called 'Father of Emotional Intelligence' refers to this ability to use better self-awareness to manage ourselves in this manner as 'Self-Management' – and it is at the core of resilience, stress management, and self-control.



Another key dimension of Emotional Intelligence is **'Awareness of Others'** – very often referred to as *'empathy'* – the ability to notice other people's emotions, and effect that they are having upon the things they say, the behaviour they deploy, and they decisions we make. Awareness of Others allows us to understand what is driving others' behaviour and therefore work more effectively with them. Goleman referred to this ability to use our awareness of others to work more effectively with them as *'Relationship Management'* – the ability to adapt our behaviour according to the emotional state of those we work with and around.

The key thing to remember about EI is that it gives us choice in how we respond to challenging situations; unlike our animal ancestors, by developing our EI we can have the choice to choose how we respond rather than being driven solely by the automatic fight, flight or freeze response.



## Emotional Intelligence and DISC combined

DISC is a useful model for understanding how we typically respond to the world around us in the absence of any learned behaviours like Emotional Intelligence. In many ways, a DISC profile is most successful at predicting how we will behave on our worst day – on that day when emotional stress has placed us under enormous pressure. Psychologists often refer to people under pressure as *'reverting to type'*; behaving exactly as we are wired behaviourally – exactly as our DISC profile shows us to be.

However, when you bring EI into the mix things can change enormously. EI slows this 'knee-jerk' behavioural response down, creating a gap between any emotional stimulus and your response to it -

allowing you to make choices about how you want to respond in any given situation, offering you the option of responding in a more considered and wise manner that will get you a better result.

So, as you consider your DISC style, you should also consider the level of your EI – the higher your EI, the more likely it is that you'll display a more mature, wise and nuanced version of the behaviour predicted by your DISC style.

Research shows that EI tends to develop as we mature – but its development can be dramatically accelerated: you can intentionally develop the competencies of Self-Awareness and Awareness of Others.

25+ years of solid research shows that EI affects the quality of our lives because it influences our behaviour and relationships. People with high EI communicate more effectively, have lower anxiety and stress, are more effective in defusing conflicts, have better personal and business relationships, are experienced as present, empathetic and trustworthy by others, and deal more effectively with the challenges of our frantic world.

Definitely worth some investment of effort!

## A Brief History of Emotional Intelligence

Although it can be described in many different ways, Emotional intelligence (EI, EQ, EIQ), is basically the capability of individuals to recognise their own emotions and those of others, discern between different feelings and label them appropriately, use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour, and manage and/or adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goal(s).

1930s - Edward Thorndike describes the concept of "social intelligence" as the ability to get along with other people.

1940s - David Wechsler suggests that affective components of emotional intelligence may be essential to success in life.

1950s - Humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow describe how people can build emotional strength.

1975 - Howard Gardner publishes *The Shattered Mind*, which introduces the concept of multiple intelligences.

1985 - Wayne Payne introduces the term emotional intelligence in his doctoral dissertation entitled "A study of emotion: developing emotional intelligence; self-integration; relating to fear, pain and desire (theory, structure of reality, problem-solving, contraction/expansion, tuning in/coming out/letting go)."

1987 - In an article published in *Mensa Magazine*, Keith Beasley uses the term "emotional quotient." It has been suggested that this is the first published use of the term.

1990 - Psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer publish their landmark article, "Emotional Intelligence," in the journal *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*.

1995 - The concept of emotional intelligence is popularised after publication of psychologist and New York Times science writer Daniel Goleman's book Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ.

### **Daniel Goleman** and Emotional Intelligence

In the 1990's Daniel Goleman became aware of Salovey and Mayer's work, and this eventually led to his book, Emotional Intelligence. Goleman was a science writer for the New York Times, specialising in brain and behaviour research. He trained as a psychologist at Harvard where he worked with David McClelland, among others. McClelland was among a growing group of researchers who were becoming concerned with how little traditional tests of cognitive intelligence told us about what it takes to be successful in life.

Goleman argued that it was not cognitive intelligence that guaranteed business success but emotional intelligence. He described emotionally intelligent people as those with four characteristics:

1. They were good at understanding their own emotions (self-awareness)
2. They were good at managing their emotions (self-management)
3. They were empathetic to the emotional drives of other people (social awareness)
4. They were good at handling other people's emotions (social skills)