

DEFINING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: AN EXPLORATION OF SOME VIEWS

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WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

We, as human beings, have been experiencing emotion since we existed. What is this phenomena and how are we to integrate it as a necessary and healthy part of ourselves?

There have been periods in our history where we have attempted to relegate emotions to the background of our existence. This has resulted in denial, but, nevertheless, our emotions have then, as a result, come out in self-destructive ways.

In order to truly function in optimal ways in all that we do, now it is time to discover the balance between emotion and reason. But, where to start?

The start is in understanding where we came from (some of the history of our view of emotion) and in reframing emotion in ways that serve us. This starts by exploring some of the definitions and models that are currently being developed and looking at their value.

AS A CULTURAL TREND

The focus here will be on our western view of emotion and how we got here. It starts with the Stoic movement of Ancient Greece (200 BCE - 300 CE). This movement viewed emotions and anything connected with them (e.g. moods and desires) as unreliable and self-centred. The Stoic philosophy influenced Jewish and Christian thought and is strongly felt today in Christianity.

Since we live in the western world and since it is influenced predominantly by the Christian religion, many people in this hemisphere will be prone to this view in an unconscious way.

“Stoicism bequeathed no small part of its disciplines, its dogmas, and its phraseology to the Christianity by which it was ingathered...Stoicism...evolved moral and social conceptions that have become an heirloom of Western civilisation, and are embedded in the inmost structure of the Christian state” As a result Christianity bears a strong “anti-emotional flavour in much of Western thought” (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000).

Since then there have been a few times where there have been uprisings against this strict code of relegating emotion to the background as something to be strictly controlled and even denied. In the 1800's European Jewish circles protested by introducing emotion against the over-intellectual traditions. Also, the European romantic movement was born with a flurry of art that expressed intensity of emotion. Then, in the 1960's came a strong movement for “anything goes”.

Also, in the 20th century, study of the emotions became an increasing area of interest. In the 1920's, an American psychologist, Edward Thorndike referred to “social intelligence”. Then, in the 1940's David Wechsler, one of the founders of IQ testing urged that we take into consideration “emotional factors” in testing procedures. Unfortunately, this was ignored. This was followed in 1948 by American researcher, R. W. Leeper with the idea that “emotional thought” contributed to “logical thought”. In 1955 Albert Ellis started to develop his technique known as Rational Emotive Therapy which encouraged people to examine their emotions. In 1983 Howard Gardner wrote about “personal intelligence” in his work on “multiple intelligences. More recently Reuven Bar-On developed the term “emotional quotient” and developed an in-depth self-reporting test of emotional intelligence in order to assess a person’s EQ inventory as a

starting point to move to developing an individual's potential in any given area. We also have the phrase "emotional intelligence" itself coined and defined by John (Jack) Mayer who has developed an ability-based test with his colleagues.

Daniel Goleman, psychologist turned writer, has done much to make this information public knowledge in his best-selling book "Emotional Intelligence" and "Working with Emotional Intelligence" as well as articles in prominent newspapers and journal articles. He has taken the basic definition from Salovey and somewhat redefined it.

Some other people currently contributing to our knowledge base that have not authored an article in *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence* include:: Candace Pert, neuroscientist and author of *Molecules of Emotion*—some astounding work from a biological basis showing the biochemical links that overcome the concept of mind and body as being separate. She shows how the neuropeptides responsible for emotions that were thought of being only in the limbic system of the brain (the seat of the emotions) are also found in large and concentrated quantities throughout the gut and heart and that there is a communication network running from the brain to these areas as well as from the gut and heart to the brain; Joseph LeDoux, scientist and author of *The Emotional Brain* and *Passion and Reason* by Bernice N. Lazarus and Richard S. Lazarus. So, even though this field is just beginning to emerge, the current research of the last twenty years is starting to generate a vast body of knowledge for us to further explore and define.

DEFINITIONS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Let's start by looking at some definitions that have come from Salovey & Mayer's work.

On p. 14 of *The EQ Edge* by Steven J. Stein and Howard Book:

Salovey & Mayer are quoted to define EI as “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions in ways that promote emotional and intellectual growth.”

This is reworded in the same paragraph to read “it’s a set of skills that enables us to make our way in a complex world—the personal, social and survival aspects of overall intelligence...it has to do with the ability to read the political and social environment, and landscape them; to intuitively grasp what others want and need, what their strengths and weaknesses are; to remain unruffled by stress; and to be engaging, the kind of person that others want to be around.”

Reuven Bar-On in *The EQ Edge* (2000) called it “an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures.”

Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, (2000) present a four-branch model of EI that is based on consensus of theories of intelligence system. Intelligence is defined as a group of mental abilities. An ability is a characteristic of an individual when that individual can successfully complete (obtain a specific outcome) a task of defined difficulty. This system (of intelligence) is defined as consisting “of a capacity for identifying or inputting information, and a capacity for processing information through both immediate symbol manipulation and reference to expert knowledge. Based on this definition of intelligence, they go on to describe the four-branch model of EI. The first branch is the capacity to perceive and to express feelings. That is, that one is aware the feeling exists. The second branch is about emotional facilitation. This refers to how emotion enters the cognitive system and alters cognition to assist thought. The third branch is about understanding and reasoning with emotion. Understanding deepens the capacity to understand

basic truths of human nature. And the fourth branch involves emotional management. This is only possible when the abilities in the first three branches are met.

Goleman (1995) starts with a definition of: knowing one's emotions, managing one's emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others and handling relationships (p. 43) but expands with "self-awareness, impulse control and delaying gratification, and handling stress and anxiety" (p. 259). With this expansion what happens is to cover many areas of personality traits which are different from EI (according to Mayer, Salovey Caruso, 2000).

RELATED CONCEPTS TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

PSYCHOLOGICAL MINDEDNESS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

What is psychological mindedness (PM)? What does it have in common with emotional intelligence (EI)? Psychological Mindedness was a concept mainly created for psychotherapists to assess the success of working with a patient. According to McCallum, Piper (2000), Silver's definition seems to be the clearest and includes: "the patient's desire to learn the possible meanings and causes of his internal and external experiences as well as the patient's ability to look inwards to psychical factors rather than only outwards to environmental factors..[and] to potentially conceptualize the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and actions".

In order for most forms of psychotherapy to be effective in reaching its goals, it is important for the patient to have this ability of PM. The goal of most forms of psychotherapy is to solve the patient's problems by linking them to unresolved intrapsychic conflicts of an unconscious nature; conflicts such as between unpermissible wishes, anxieties, or fears to which these wishes give

rise and partially effective defence mechanisms that are mobilized to cope with the anxiety and maintain the repression of the wish.

If the patient cannot see the relationship between his problems and their underlying conflicts, s/he will not be in a position to work through them; hence, the psychotherapy will be ineffective or less effective.

Even though PM was a concept developed to determine if a patient was suitable for psychotherapy, it can also be looked at as one of the abilities involved in EI. It is already evident from the definitions of EI looked at so far, the one of the foundational abilities is “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings...” (Salovey and Mayer as quoted in *The EQ Edge*, p. 14).

Both the process of PM and the part of EI defined here have to do with looking inwards, seeing and understanding the meaning of what is going on. Included with this is looking at the emotions. Therefore, PM is part of EI.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

This is a concept much older than EI. In an Article by Hedlund, Sternberg (2000) Thorndike described it as “the abilities to understand others and to act or behave wisely in relation to others”. Here again one can see the link to EI in the definition of “it’s a set of skills that enables us to make our way in a complex world—the personal, social and survival aspects of overall intelligence...it has to do with the ability to read the political and social environment, and landscape them; to intuitively grasp what others want and need, what their strengths and weaknesses are; to remain unruffled by stress; and to be engaging, the kind of person that others

want to be around.”

PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE

Practical Intelligence can include but is not limited to social intelligence. Practical problems are ones that are faced in everyday life and can include those of a social nature. Hedlund, Sternberg (2000) define it as “intelligence that serves to find a more optimal fit between the individual and the demands of the individual’s environment, by adapting to the environment, change (or shaping) the environment, or selecting a different environment”.

As I read the above article, I did not see a strong relationship between practical intelligence and emotional intelligence. Practical intelligence had more to do with problem-solving skills with everyday problems of a practical nature and did not bring into its definition anything about perceiving, processing or managing emotions. The only thing they did have in common is that both required some kind of cognitive abilities, but this was a sketchy similarity.

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Another construct that has a connection with EI is from Gardner.

One of Gardner’s multiples intelligences is known as personal intelligences with two subtypes known as intrapersonal intelligence and interpersonal intelligence.

Gardner’s concept of intrapersonal intelligence is described as:

The core capacity at work here is access to one’s feeling life—one’s range of affects or emotions: the capacity instantly to effect discriminations among these feelings and, eventually, to label them to enmesh them in symbolic codes, to draw upon them as a

means of understanding and guiding one's behaviour. In its most primitive form, the intrapersonal intelligence amounts to little more than the capacity to distinguish a feeling of pleasure from one of pain and, on the basis of such a discrimination, to become more involved in or to withdraw from a situation. At its most advanced level, intrapersonal knowledge allows one to detect and to symbolize complex and highly differentiated sets of feelings.

One can see from Gardner's definitions of intrapersonal intelligence that there is an overlap between this construct and the construct of psychological mindedness as well as the first part of the construct of emotional intelligence by Salovey and Mayer.

ALEXITHYMIA

This concept originated approximately fifty years ago and grew from observing that many patients with psychosomatic disorders showed an inability to verbalize feelings. They also seemed to be unimaginative, used physical action or their bodies for emotional expression and responded poorly to insight-oriented psychotherapies. In other words, they did not show very much psychological mindedness.

This term was coined by Sifneos from the Greek; *a* meaning *lack*, *lexis* meaning *word*, and *thymos* meaning *emotion*.

Patients were prone to binge eating, alcohol abuse and other compulsive behaviours as well as posttraumatic states.

The features of Alexithymia are (1) difficulty identifying feelings and distinguishing between feelings and the bodily sensation of emotional arousal (2) difficulty describing feelings to other

people (3) constricted imaginal processes and (4) a stimulus-bound, externally oriented cognitive style. (Taylor, Bagby, 2000)

Although many people will have the above features from time to time, alexithymic people are on the extreme end of the continuum with regard to these features. In turn, these features resulted in psychosomatic disorders that were not successfully treated from a medical perspective.

It is also interesting to note that studies were performed with alexithymic people on the nature of their dreams. It was discovered that their dreams tended to be very concrete, for example, they either contained explicit mental content such as scenes of violence or replayed a daytime experience without the usual dream elements of symbolization, condensation, and displacement. They would dream something like, “I was washing the car.” or “I was getting groceries”.

So, what is the connection between EI and Alexithymia?

A self-report scale was developed by Schutte based on Salovey & Mayer’s original definition of emotional intelligence. The scale has “33 items that assess the appraisal and expression of emotions in self and others, regulation of emotion in self and other, and utilization of emotions in solving problems”. (Taylor, Bagby, 2000) In a small sample of 25 students the scale correlated strongly and negatively with the self-report Toronto Alexithymia Scale.

The relationship between Alexithymia and EI was also explored on a larger scale (N=734) by using the revised Twenty-Item Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS20) and the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i). The EQ-i uses intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences as well as adaptability, stress management, and general mood. As predicted, the results were that the TAS-20 correlated strongly and negatively with the total score on the EQ-i across the board. These findings were consistent with clinical observations that alexithymic people lack emotional self-

awareness and empathy and also have difficulty establishing warm, intimate relationships. In other words, people with Alexythymia scored low on emotional intelligence tests.

OBSERVATIONS

Even though researchers are still struggling with the definition of EI, I think we have the definition—we just don't know it. The risk of too broad a definition comes from the confusion of recognizing that EI is inextricably linked to, but not part of, personality traits or character traits e.g. extroversion, optimism, existential belief systems, self-talk, self-regard, empathy, etc. and linked to strategies of developing EI. The definition needs to be limited in order to develop useful and valid measurement techniques. There are already some fine tools and programs available that address some of the finer points of raising EI. If we begin with the end in mind, where the end is to move towards greater emotional health (now there's something else that will require a more succinct and refined definition), we already know and can apply some strategies to get there. Now it is time to decide on a more universal definition that is limited enough in scope to be able to further perform research and design strategies for application.

As I was in the process of exploring material for this essay, I did not see any significant criticism of Salovey and Mayer's definition of EI.

As far as the other definitions go cited in this paper, they do not seem to fall outside Salovey/Mayer's definition. Most of them say the same thing in a different way or in more detail. The difference is that there is an overlap or some researchers expand the basic definition to include too much to measure. Once we decide on a basic, limited universal definition of EI, we can then study the relationship of this definition to the personality traits. These traits will then be outside the scope of, but related to the definition of EI.

I hypothesize we will see positive correlations between high EI factors (already defined in some tests) and specific personality traits. This is already becoming apparent with some measurement techniques such as EQ-i, TAS-20, MEIS, etc. The value in this is in the application of strategies to increase EI. One would see strategies developing to increase compassionate self-talk, recognizing and changing faulty or unrealistic existential belief systems about the self, developing awareness of the self by paying attention to bodily sensation that occur during a specific emotional state. It would be interesting to take an EI test as a baseline, work on the above strategies for a few years with a coach or psychotherapist and then take the same EI test to see if our EI was increased as a result of learning new coping strategies. We can become aware if we focus, and one of the first steps to EI is awareness of our emotions.

In spite of the struggle to arrive at a definition of what EI is and is not, we have enough information to move on and develop practical strategies for the environments of families, school, work and governments to start designing and implementing programs to increase various aspects of people's EI.

Although it is understandable to see academia struggle to come up with a definition of EI that will allow researchers to develop a variety of measurement techniques, it is also concerning in that this constant conceptual talk it will be only something that begins with words and ends with words, and, therefore, delay the development of good programs and resources. We need to decide what is included in EI and move on to develop programs to allow people to increase their "intelligences" so that they can live happy, productive and harmonious lives and to be able to meet life's challenges successfully. I have already seen what appears to be many useful measurements and programs even though they may be criticised because they don't exactly meet

a specified definition of EI or incorporate concepts that are over and above EI (e.g. optimism, empathy).

For example, the Self-Science Curriculum developed by Karen McCown is a comprehensive emotional intelligence program for K-12. Their definition of EI is “consciously choosing thoughts, feelings, and actions in our relationships with ourselves and others. The curriculum has been used since 1967! Its initial development and foundation was supported by Ralph Tyler, Head of the Behavioural Sciences Research Laboratory and Ernest R. Hilgard, head of the Psychology Department at Stanford University. It has incorporated ideas from people such as Carl Jung and Jean Piaget. In its development, people such as Abraham Maslow, Anna Freud and Eric Erikson were consulted. It was also influenced by Jerome Bruner’s work. Its roots are in both the cognitive and affective domains. It is, according to Daniel Goleman “a model for the teaching of emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995, p. 268)

In the self-help section, one will increasingly find how-to books on EI. These are labelled by academia as pop-literature with an implied message of this information not being any good because they do not come out of academic circles and do not have a foundation of strict, scientific research. However, when one looks at some of these books, they HAVE come as a result of scientific scrutiny. Also, there are some things that we, as human beings, learn about ourselves and how to manage ourselves that are true, but we have not yet been able to produce scientific evidence. Sometimes science is behind in our mysterious knowing through intuition and generations of gathered wisdom. True, this puts us at risk for mistaking myth for truth, but not always. Science is not the only way to know something is true. The popular literature has an abundance of intuitive information that presents opportunities to be investigated by scientific

means. This will sort the wheat from the chaff. And, sometimes, it may be many years for what we know to be true in an intuitive sense deep inside us as human beings before we can develop scientific techniques to confirm this knowing.

For example, the book *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting* by John Gottman, Ph.D. This book was the result of research in 1984 on “meta-emotion” with John Gottman visiting Robert Levenson in Paul Ekman’s lab in San Francisco. Levenson supported Gottman’s first psychophysiology lab. The research was also supported by many research grants through NIMH. The book uses the concepts of EI and applies them to real life by citing real-life situations and looks at various ways to handle them that would be considered emotionally intelligent. There are also parent training groups in operation. And now there is Equiversity of the web with 17 different courses corresponding to the 17 aspects of EI cited in the book, *The EQ Edge*. It is this kind of material and these kinds of programs that make the “real” difference in our lives, regardless of endless argument about definitions.

And then there are programs in the workplace like the ones developed by Robert Cooper, Ph. D. who also developed a measuring system of EI known as the EQ map.

We need to be mindful that all aspects of attempting to define and apply EI are honoured for their unique value. Over time a development of a balance and blended approach to conceptualizing and applying EI will take place.

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