

Emotional Intelligence factsheet

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the area of cognitive ability that regulates interpersonal behaviour. This factsheet will provide top tips to improve Emotional Intelligence within your organisation.

The term 'emotional intelligence' was popularised in 1995 by psychologist and behavioural science journalist Dr. Daniel Goleman in his book, 'Emotional Intelligence'. Dr. Goleman described emotional intelligence as "a person's ability to manage their feelings so that those feelings are expressed appropriately and effectively". According to Goleman, emotional intelligence is the largest single predictor of success in the workplace.

Emotional intelligence is broken down into 5 key stages. Some parts of this journey may feel more natural to some people than others, but at each stage we are all able to develop and enhance these skills further:

1) *Self-awareness*

Self-awareness is the first stepping-stone in the emotional intelligence journey. It's about being truly in touch with the emotions you are feeling yourself.

You are able to recognise your emotional reactions, which may manifest in physical reactions such as faster breathing, or tension in your body.

You'll also likely be able to identify your own emotional triggers – the root of what is causing your reaction.

2) *Self-regulation*

Once you have mastered being conscious of your own feelings, the next stage is being able to balance them. It's a common misconception that this means we should suppress emotions that are typically perceived as 'negative', such as anger, fear, or anxiety.

This is not the case, and all our emotions have a function. Self-regulation is about understanding them, reflecting on what that means to us, and then making a decision around how to act.

The skill is in being able to consciously process these emotions in healthy ways, in order to respect our own feelings and act in a thoughtful manner.

3) *Internal (or intrinsic) motivation*

Self-motivation is a highly useful skill. Those who are emotionally intelligent are able to find motivation, and commit to action, even when their initial feelings may be negative.

4) *Empathy*

If you've heard the saying 'put yourself in someone else's shoes', that's the basis of empathy. It's the ability to try on multiple 'shoes' and see things from multiple perspectives, in order to understand why others behave how they do.

Often, we will have to put our own feelings or opinions aside on the subject, to truly understand the other person.

5) *Social skills*

Social skills are about being able to build upon empathy, and use the verbal and non-verbal cues from those around you in order to understand how people are feeling.

You'll also likely have an awareness of how the environment influences people's emotions and behaviour.

Those who are highly emotionally intelligent have the ability to connect with others and build positive relationships, through modifying their behaviour depending on the context of different situations.

The good news is that Emotional Intelligence can be improved, so whilst not everyone will excel in all areas listed above, there are plenty of opportunities to develop these, and ensure your organisation can benefit from emotionally intelligent colleagues and managers.

How to improve Emotional Intelligence in the workplace

On a basic level, Emotional Intelligence is about how individuals recognise and manage emotions and just as importantly, their response to the emotions of others.

The ability to understand and process emotions, as well as recognise how emotions impact behaviour, can help to gain a greater control over reactions, actions and decision making. It also enables individuals to develop strategies to regulate and manage emotions, particularly in pressured situations and/or environments.

When at work, there are both inside and outside factors which may negatively influence the behaviour and performance of other colleagues. Being able to effectively recognise these negative behaviours can ensure more empathy towards our colleagues and those we may manage, while also offering support.

5 steps to improving self-awareness

As mentioned earlier, self-awareness is the first stepping-stone in the Emotional Intelligence journey. Take these steps to ensure that you are truly in touch with the emotions you are feeling yourself.

1) *How are you feeling right now?*

The competing pressures we all face can often influence how we feel in work and importantly how we are able to manage situations.

Often, we can forget to check in with ourselves and whilst we probably know this is an important thing to do, we can forget to do it regularly.

To enable us to consider how we are feeling we would all benefit from taking some time to reflect or take some time after a meeting or interaction to understand if there are any trends or patterns that emerge. Consider keeping a diary of interactions or events in work; how were you feeling before and after, would you have done anything differently in hindsight, and then take action to address these findings.

2) *Consider your blind spots*

We are all becoming increasingly aware of our blind spots and the potential risk of unconscious bias creeping into our thinking.

You can learn more about unconscious bias in our [Top tips for managing bias at work factsheet](#).

Exposing ourselves to contradictions and challenging our world views can help us to become more emotionally intelligent and recognise the perspectives of colleagues as valuable sources of information and learning.

3) *Ask your peers for their opinions*

It can be difficult to recognise some of our own strengths and weaknesses. An important part of emotional intelligence is our own self-awareness.

Understanding how others perceive you can help you to gain some valuable insight into your strengths and weaknesses. Try to take this feedback as objectively as possible as this can help you to continue to develop your own self-awareness.

4) *What are your triggers?*

We all have our preferred way of working and personal experiences that make us unique within our organisation. Being self-aware and aware of our motivation, and also our triggers, can help us to predict how we will react in certain situations.

Preparing yourself with this knowledge can be hugely beneficial particularly when starting a new project or engaging in challenging meetings. You may need to allow yourself more time or prepare slightly differently armed with this knowledge.

5) *Acknowledge what you still have to learn*

Stepping outside of our comfort zone can seem scary but it is a significant part of emotional intelligence and our personal development and growth. You can do this in a variety of different ways, but why not check out our podcast [“Talking Inclusion With...”](#) as a great starting point.

Ways to improve emotional intelligence in your workplace

These tips will help you to take action to improve emotional intelligence and learning in the workplace:

1) *Emotional intelligence assessments*

If we want to improve emotional intelligence, it can be really helpful for us to get an understanding of where we are currently at.

There are different types of tests that could be undertaken, such as self-report tests, where you fill in a survey, or ability tests where you take part in situational tasks.

These type of assessments are great for managers, or people whose roles require a high level of emotional intelligence. The assessments help you reflect on strengths, and figure out where your areas of focus should be.

2) *Active listening upskill*

Active listening is a highly sought-after skill, and one which enables a mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener.

The principle of active listening can be taught through workshops, and skill can be built through practice over time.

3) *Mindfulness workshops*

The concept of mindfulness is about being fully present in the moment, in order to understand ourselves.

This is really crucial in terms of developing self awareness. If we apply this to the workplace, its about thinking before reacting and giving ourselves time for reflection.

Mindfulness workshops can help teach employees tools that will support them with this both in their personal and working lives.

4) *Encourage openness*

One of the best ways we can improve Emotional Intelligence in workplaces is by putting value on the emotions that our colleagues are feeling in the first place. Making space for emotions to be shared and respected shows employees that they do not need to hide their emotions. This might be [openness around mental health](#), sharing feelings on organisational change, or talking about personal experiences which may be impacting us at work.