

## What's emotional intelligence and how will it improve my practice?

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Emotional intelligence (EI) has gained a good deal more prominence in recent years, but many of the ideas behind it have been around for much longer. E. Thorndike came up with the concept of 'Social Intelligence' back in 1920, but Mayer & Salovey in 1990, followed by Daniel Goleman publishing his books in 1995 brought it to the attention of a much wider audience.

EI is becoming ever more important as a business tool as organisations strive to survive the fast pace and constantly changing world in which we operate. There's a need to be more flexible and resilient; people are looking for more 'meaning' to their working life as their other, lower order needs (Maslow) have been met in our consumer society.

Emotional intelligence is all about how we manage our personalities in our efforts to be successful; it helps us to direct our energy in a positive way instead of burning it up through getting trapped in negative emotions. To do so we need to become more attuned to our emotions, to know how we are feeling and use this crucial information in our decision making.

Often people are hired because they have great qualifications on their CV and they seem to have an enviable depth of knowledge. When we watch them at work their skills are unquestionable and yet those same employees can become a problem because they don't have good work habits and their attitude towards work and other staff is poor. The issue here is a lack of emotional intelligence.

EI has four main components:

- Self awareness (at a deep level) so that I know what I'm feeling and how I'm acting without delusion.
- Self management which helps me to deal with my moods and bounce back from any setbacks I encounter.
- Awareness of others, so that I can tune into what's going on for them.
- Relationship management which includes developing others and motivating them; collaborating with them and confronting them. All key elements of effective leadership.

Unlike our IQ which is relatively fixed, our EI is changeable which means that once I am aware of myself and how different behaviours may be affecting my ability to succeed, I can learn ways to improve and manage myself so that I become more effective. In other words, I can fix many facets of my personality which are getting in my way - they don't need to become fatal flaws!

A lot of time and energy is used up in the workplace dealing with the fallout from a heated exchange or a situation where somebody has overreacted. Increasing people's emotional intelligence can reduce that time and energy and therefore increase productivity. The elements of EI have often been termed the 'soft skills', but they can in fact be the hardest ones for us to deal with and are vital since becoming more emotionally intelligent can be a core factor to our success.