

# Overview of Emotional Intelligence

## History and Measures of Emotional Intelligence

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The ability to express and control our emotions is essential, but so is our ability to understand, interpret, and respond to the emotions of others. Imagine a world in which you could not understand when a friend was feeling sad or when a co-worker was angry. Psychologists refer to this ability as emotional intelligence, and some experts even suggest that **it can be more important than IQ** in your overall success in life.

### Overview

**Emotional intelligence (EI)** refers to the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. Some researchers suggest that emotional intelligence can be learned and strengthened, while others claim it's an inborn characteristic.

Since 1990, **Peter Salovey** and **John D. Mayer** have been the leading researchers on emotional intelligence. In their influential article **Emotional Intelligence**, they defined emotional intelligence as *'the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions'*.

### A Brief History

Emotional intelligence as a term didn't come into our vernacular until around 1990. Despite being a relatively young term, interest in the concept has grown tremendously over the last 20 years.

### Early Growth:

As early as the 1930s, however, the psychologist **Edward Thorndike** described the concept of *'social intelligence'* as the ability to get along with other people. During the 1940s, the psychologist **David Wechsler** proposed that different affective components of intelligence could play an important role in how successful people are in life.

### Later Developments:

The 1950s saw the rise of the school of thought known as humanistic psychology, and thinkers such as **Abraham Maslow** focused greater attention on the different ways that people could build emotional strength. Another important concept to emerge in the



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development of emotional intelligence was the notion of **multiple intelligences**. This concept was put forth in the mid-1970s by **Howard Gardner**, introducing the idea that intelligence was more than just a single, general ability.

## The Emergence of Emotional Intelligence:

It was not until 1985 that the term '**emotional intelligence**' was first used in a doctoral dissertation by **Wayne Payne**. In 1987, an article published in *Mensa Magazine*, **Keith Beasley** uses the term '**emotional quotient**'. Some suggest that this is the first published use of the phrase, although **Reuven Bar-On** claims to have used the term in an unpublished version of his graduate thesis. In 1990, psychologists **Peter Salovey** and **John Mayer** publish their landmark article, '**Emotional Intelligence**', in the journal *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*.

In 1995, the concept of emotional intelligence is popularised after the publication of psychologist and New York Times science writer **Daniel Goleman's** book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. The topic of emotional intelligence has continued to capture the public interest since and has become important in fields outside of psychology including education and business.

## Components

**Salovey** and **Mayer** proposed a model that identified four different levels of emotional intelligence, including emotional perception, the ability to reason using emotions, the ability to understand emotion, and the ability to manage emotions.

1. **Perceiving emotions:** The first step in understanding emotions is to perceive them accurately. In many cases, this might involve understanding nonverbal signals such as **body language** and **facial expressions**.
2. **Reasoning with emotions:** The next step involves using emotions to promote thinking and cognitive activity. Emotions help prioritize what we pay attention and react to; we respond emotionally to things that garner our attention.
3. **Understanding emotions:** The emotions that we perceive can carry a wide variety of meanings. If someone is expressing angry emotions, the observer must interpret the cause of the person's anger and what it could mean. For example, if your boss is acting angry, it might mean that he is dissatisfied with your work, or it could be because he got a speeding ticket on his way to work that morning or that he's been fighting with his wife.
4. **Managing emotions:** The ability to manage emotions effectively is a crucial part of emotional intelligence and the highest level. Regulating emotions, responding appropriately, and responding to the emotions of others are all important aspects of emotional management.

According to Salovey and Mayer, the four branches of their model are '**arranged from more basic psychological processes to higher, more psychologically integrated processes**. For example, the lowest level branch concerns the (relatively) simple abilities of perceiving and expressing emotion. In contrast, the highest level branch concerns the conscious, reflective regulation of emotion'.

## Examples

There are many examples of how emotional intelligence can play a role in daily life.

- **Being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes.** A large part of emotional intelligence is being able to think about and empathise with how other people are feeling. This often involves considering how you would respond if you were in their same situation. People who have strong emotional intelligence are able to consider the perspectives, experiences, and emotions of other people and use this information to explain why people behave the way that they do.
- **Considering a situation before reacting.** Emotionally intelligent people know that emotions can be powerful, but also temporary. When a highly charged emotional event happens, such as becoming angry with a co-worker over some type of conflict, the emotionally intelligent response would be to take some time before responding. This allows everyone to calm their emotions and think more rationally about all the factors surrounding the argument.
- **Being aware of one's own emotions.** Emotionally intelligent people are not only good at thinking about how other people might feel; they are also adept at understanding their own feelings. Self-awareness allows people to consider the many different factors that contribute to their emotions.

## Testing

A number of different assessments have emerged to measure levels of emotional intelligence. Such tests generally fall into one of two types: self-report tests and ability tests.

Self-report tests are the most common because they are the easiest to administer and score. On such tests, respondents respond to questions or statements by rating their own behaviours. For example, on a statement such as "*I often feel that I understand how others are feeling*". a test-take might describe the statement as disagree, somewhat disagree, agree, or strongly agree.

Ability tests involve having people respond to situations and then assessing their skills. Such tests often require people to demonstrate their abilities, which are then rated by a third party.



If you are taking an emotional intelligence administered by a mental health professional, here are some of the measures that might be used:

- **Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i):** A self-report test designed to measure competencies including self-perception, decision making, stress management, self-expression, and interpersonal relationships. The test is available to professionals who are qualified to use the assessment.
- **Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT):** An ability-based test that measures the four branches of Mayer and Salovey's EI model. Test-takers perform tasks designed to assess their ability to perceive, identify, understand, and manage emotions.
- **Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (ESCI):** Based on an older instrument known as the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, the ESCI involves having people who know the individual offer ratings of that person's abilities in several different emotional competencies. The test is designed to evaluate the social and emotional abilities that help distinguish people as strong leaders.

There are also plenty of more informal online resources, many of them free, to investigate your emotional intelligence. **For example, check out [this EQ test](#) (as a fun way to learn more about some of your emotional strengths and weaknesses).**

## Improving

Interest in teaching and learning social and emotional intelligence has grown in recent years. Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs have become a standard part of the curriculum for many schools. The goal of these initiatives is not only to improve health and well-being, but also to help students succeed academically and prevent bullying.

Clearly, being emotionally intelligent is important, but what steps can you take to improve your own social and emotional skills? Here are some tips.

### Listen:

If you want to understand what other people are feeling, the first step is to pay attention. Take the time to listen to what people are trying to tell you, both verbally and non-verbally. Body language can carry a great deal of meaning. When you sense that someone is feeling a certain way, consider the different factors that might be contributing to that emotion.

### Empathise:

Picking up on emotions is critical, but you also need to be able to put yourself into someone else's shoes in order to truly understand their point of view. Practice empathising with other people. Imagine how you would feel in their situation. Such activities can help you



build emotional understanding of a specific situation as well as develop stronger emotional skills in the long-term.

### **Reflect:**

The ability to reason with emotions is an important part of emotional intelligence. Consider how your own emotions influence your decisions and behaviours. When you are thinking about how other people respond, assess the role that their emotions play. Why is this person feeling this way? Are there any unseen factors that might be contributing to these feelings? How do your emotions differ from theirs? As you explore such questions, you may find that it becomes easier to understand the role that emotions play in how people think and behave.

### **A Final Word:**

**Emotional intelligence is essential for good interpersonal communication. Some experts believe that this ability is more important in determining life success than IQ alone.**

Fortunately, there are things that you can do to strengthen your own social and emotional intelligence. **Understanding emotions can be the key to better relationships, improved well-being, and stronger communication skills.**

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