

EQ – Does it matter more than IQ?

by Ben Rawal

IQ tests have traditionally been the most reliable method of predicting future success and well-being. However, as Ben Rawal explains, developing your emotional intelligence can provide greater insights into your future happiness, career success and your ability to build effective relationships.

For many years, the IQ test has been the preferred tool for not only testing intelligence, but also indicating whether an individual will be successful in their career and other aspects of life. Despite this, recent research has highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence and related measuring tools (such as the emotional quotient (EQ)), as a more accurate indicator than IQ.

This article explores some of the benefits of developing emotional intelligence and provides some useful tips on how this can be achieved.

The Basics of Emotional Intelligence

In its purest form, emotional intelligence is concerned with our understanding and response to emotions – our own and those of others.

Despite our insistence as accountants that we think and act logically, the importance of emotion in our decision making is often misunderstood. For example, all of our decisions are in effect, made twice. Initially, the emotional area of our brain (the Limbic System) quickly reviews the information available and decides whether to act. This review is often clumsy, based on assumptions and does not consider rational thought as important. It may however keep you alive when it detects danger and remains a critical part of how our brains have evolved during the past c2 million years.

Assuming that we are not facing immediate danger or are overcome with emotion – perceived or real, the logical area of our brain (the Neocortex) now has an opportunity to ‘think’. This generally involves the

consideration of facts, logical thought and reasoning.

A critical part of strong emotional intelligence is whether we recognise that our emotions can impact how we behave and whether we have the ability to manage and regulate how we act. Individuals that are adept at managing and regulating their emotions, are usually seen as better leaders, more consistent work colleagues and less prone to uncontrollable emotional outbursts.

Understanding Oneself

The ability to manage and regulate our emotions is facilitated through whether we have a good understanding of ourselves. This includes sound knowledge of the emotions we feel, when we’re feeling them and whether we can associate our emotions with our resultant actions. Commonly referred to as ‘self-awareness’, recognising and validating your feelings is an essential first step to developing strong emotional intelligence.

So how can we classify our emotions? Based on research undertaken by Daniel Goleman (Emotional Intelligence) and Paul Ekman (Emotions Revealed), our emotions can be condensed into eight specific ‘areas’:

- Joy
- Sadness
- Fear
- Anger
- Disgust
- Surprise
- Love
- Shame

Each of these emotions causes a different physiological response and is expressed differently.

Although individuals differ in how they experience each emotion, commonalities include an increased heart rate and breathing when feeling anger or fear, and the rapid raising of eyebrows when experiencing surprise.

Understanding how you feel when experiencing each of these emotions (or combinations) can prove useful in determining how subsequent behaviours can occur.

Imagine that you were expecting one of your team members to complete a report by a set deadline, but they were unable to achieve this. How would this make you feel, and how would this influence your behaviour? If your level of self-awareness is already well developed, you will recognise how this will affect your emotional state, regardless of whether this provokes fear, anger, surprise or shame (or a combination of all four!)

Emotional Regulation

Understanding our emotions and how we are feeling creates the opportunity for more careful management and regulation of behaviours and actions.

“Emotional intelligence is concerned with our understanding and response to emotions”

For example, by consistently responding to the feeling of anger by raising the volume of our voice or even becoming physically aggressive, we are likely to eventually face negative consequences. Similarly, if we frequently allow excessive levels of joy to become uncontrollable excitement, it is possible that this behaviour may be frowned upon – at least over a period of time.

Generally, individuals with a good level of emotional regulation are more successful in their career. Not only do such individuals effectively manage the 'highs' of success in business by remaining focused but deal with personal failures and setbacks through resilience and positivity. All of these behaviours are aligned to emotional (EQ), rather than standard (IQ) intelligence.

An important point to note here however, is the difference between emotional regulation and emotional suppression. Whereas emotional regulation ensures that the feeling is felt, validated and accepted, emotional suppression focuses on avoiding, ignoring or even 'blocking' the feeling. This approach is common amongst individuals that seem consistently calm and never appear to show any signs of 'emotion'. In these instances, the individual has become skilled at ignoring the feeling, and can sometimes come across as 'cold' or lacking emotion.

Emotional suppression is most commonly observed in individuals that ignore the pressures of stress. Often, the feelings experienced during stress, including frustration (and often shame) gradually build over time. This can sometimes result in an intense emotional outburst or breakdown when the pressure finally becomes too much.

Building Relationships

By understanding our own emotions, it generally becomes easier to understand those of others. At the core of this relationship between ourselves and others, is the concept of empathy – the ability to 'step into the shoes' of someone else and understand how they feel.

Individuals that display strong levels of empathy are usually more effective at forming and maintaining relationships with others.

As accountants, developing positive relationships with our customers and teams is clearly beneficial to maintaining and generating business. Although high levels of IQ will help in providing a logical argument, EQ will get you closer to your customers and help you to truly understand their problems and concerns.

In addition to developing the ability to empathise, our approach to creating an emotional and neurological connection with others is also significantly advanced when we understand ourselves. This connection (known more commonly as 'rapport') comes through understanding others' perspectives, emotions and interests. The more we are prepared to invest our time in building rapport, the more likely we are to develop meaningful and worthwhile relationships.

But what about IQ?

With the recent 'explosion' of literature and research in emotional intelligence, it is sometimes easy to forget the value that IQ continues to have in a wider business sense.

One of the key measurement areas of IQ is an individual's ability to learn, and their capability for understanding and application of the learning. Without this, even the most self-aware of individuals will fail to develop their emotional intelligence skills further.

In addition, as our decision making involves aspects of both emotional and logical responses, IQ offers a guide to the effectiveness of an individual's logical reasoning and the ability to analyse information.

In terms of its usefulness for career progression, IQ remains an essential tool.



Conclusion

The increasing complexity and profile of emotional intelligence in recent years has been helpful in challenging why and how individuals can improve the likelihood of career success. Closely aligned to strong, well-rounded leaders, developing emotional intelligence has become a 'must have' skill during the past 10-15 years, and professional accountants are no different in this regard.

Despite this, it is important to recognise that IQ is not a 'redundant' measurement tool. It continues to offer insight into multiple areas that are not covered by EQ, and will no doubt continue to be used as part of recruitment and selection exercises for many years.

Perhaps it is now time to adopt a more balanced approach to traditional intelligence and emotional aptitude.

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Top Tips:



Learn more about yourself

Emotional Intelligence is founded on understanding oneself. Invest time in learning more about how you feel and recognising the physiological differences in each emotion.



Challenge your own beliefs

What do you believe about yourself and others that might be holding you back? Take time to reflect on your thoughts, particularly as you develop your self-awareness.



Ask for feedback

Feedback from others can sometimes be painful, but remember it is simply a perception. The choice is yours as to whether you change your behaviours.



Keep a record of your 'feelings'

Once you are comfortable with how you feel, keep a record of any significant emotional changes, and try to identify what may have triggered the change.



Coaching

Consider using a professional coach to help provide independent challenge to your emotional development.