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By John D. Mayer and David Caruso

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The effective leader: Understanding and applying emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence can be misunderstood and misrepresented. But the bottom line is that the manager who can think about emotions accurately and clearly may often be better able to anticipate, cope with, and effectively manage change.

By John D. Mayer and David Caruso

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Emotional information plays a critical role in our working lives since the relationships we form are governed by rules of behaviour - of cooperation and dominance, among others - that are triggered by our emotions. Being able to understand this information, and its impact on personnel and the organization, is what makes an individual, at least in part, emotionally intelligent. Not surprisingly, then, business leaders who can "embrace the emotional side of an organization will infuse strength and meaning into management structures, and bring them to life." (Barach, J.A., and Eckhardt, D.R., *Leadership and The Job Of the Executive*, Quorum Books, Westport, Connecticut, 1996). In brief, leaders who can use their feelings and their knowledge of them constructively will have certain advantages over those who cannot. In this article, I will discuss how leaders can enhance their understanding of the role and impact of emotions.

The concept of emotional intelligence

Before the 1990s, EI had been an overlooked part of human nature - recognized intuitively sometimes, but not examined according to rigorous, scientific criteria.

The new scientific idea behind EI is that human beings process emotional information; they comprehend and utilize emotional information about social relationships. This idea was launched in two 1990 scientific articles by Peter Salovey and myself. Daniel Goleman's successful popularization of those early articles on emotional intelligence, and the related work of many other scientists, led to a great deal of popular discussion of the idea. This popular notion of EI as anything but IQ has created a new management fad. Unfortunately, the faddish appeal of emotional intelligence has encouraged many people engaged in otherwise legitimate business consultation to include a wide variety of approaches and concepts under the umbrella e m o t i o n a l intelligence.

We believe in a definition of EI that has been developed after many years of scientific study and real-world experience. To explain our definition, it helps to begin with the two terms that make it up. The terms - emotion and intelligence - have specific, generally agreed upon scientific meanings that indicate the possible ways they can be used together. Emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear refer to feelings that signal information about relationships. For example, happiness signals harmonious relationships, whereas fear signals being threatened. Intelligence refers to the capacity to carry out abstract reasoning,

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recognize patterns, and compare and contrast. Emotional intelligence, then, refers to the capacity to understand and explain emotions, on the one hand, and of emotions to enhance thought, on the other.

Emotional intelligence in the workplace: A case study
The capacity to reason with and about emotion is frequently important in management and leadership. Consider the case of Jerry Taksic (this and other names have been changed).

Jerry was a well-regarded operations manager at a New York City office of Merrill Lynch. Several years ago, he supervised the move of some in his group from their offices in the city across the river to an office park in Jersey City. The move was seemingly welcomed by the staff, most of who lived on the other side of the river. The move would dramatically cut down their commuting time and reduce their tax bills. Jerry handled this project with his usual meticulousness and concern. He worked with the designers and the architects, as well as building management, to ensure a smooth transition. Jerry never expected perfection, and perfection was not to be realized. Soon after the move, he fielded a phone call at his downtown office from Eddie Fontaine, the group manager at the Jersey City location. Eddie reported that his group had become concerned that they were working in a "sick" building, because a number of employees were suffering from respiratory problems. Although Eddie made light of their concerns, Jerry perceived concern in the group and began to investigate the situation. He called in a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) team, and it, along with environmental engineers, were dispatched to the site. They inventoried the physical plant, and shortly thereafter, filed their report.

Jerry and Eddie reviewed the report together: The HVAC team could not detect any problem with the building. Jerry appreciated that Eddie and the group might be feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the move, as well as somewhat isolated and cut-off from the rest of the team's work. Given the context, Jerry supported his group leader, complimented him on his general expertise, and let the matter drop. For the time being, Jerry was handling the emotions of his team effectively. Shortly thereafter, however, a second situation arose concerning parking problems. Ever the problem-solver, Jerry personally intervened with the building

management to resolve the situation to his staff's satisfaction. As with the building ventilation problem, this was a time-consuming issue that detracted from the primary mission of both Jerry and his group. Jerry's supervisor began to become concerned about the group's apparent lack of focus and lowered productivity. When the supervisor asked Jerry if intervening in such problems was a good use of his time, Jerry replied, "That's my job. I solve problems." Yet another such problem arose a few days later, however, and Jerry's patience began to wear thin.

Case analysis according to the EI Ability Model

Jerry was facing a somewhat typical work issue. He was a generally competent manager who implemented a change (in this case, a move), and was confronted by a series of at-work issues and problems by the team undergoing the change. Jerry's issues happened to come to light because at about that time, he was referred for executive coaching by the division president, who worried that Jerry's team's performance was suffering. There are many different ways to analyze a case, of course. One might speak in terms of motivating the workforce to return to work, and look at the incentives surrounding the move and the incentives to complain about it. Or, one might speak in terms of setting boundaries and imposing penalties for those who are disrupting morale, or about treating employees like customers and making them happy. The EI analysis of Jerry's situation begins, as it does in most cases, with an appreciation of the fact that both the technical and emotional aspects of situations are closely intertwined. This means that something that looks technical may become emotional, and something that seems emotional can become technical. For example, in the present case, each of the problems raised by the satellite group -- sick buildings, parking, and other matters, were real technical

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issues. The string of issues together, however, suggested an emotional component: that the team's move had triggered some negative or worried feelings.

Jerry's handling of the initial, sick-building problem seemed judicious. He could, first of all, have missed the emotional concerns, if he were poor at perceiving emotions, or ignored them, if he didn't care.



Alternatively, he could have focussed solely on the emotional components, and ignored the technical issues of a real, possible, health risk. He did well, however, by attending to the feelings involved and intervening by investigating the building condition with an HVAC team.

His reaction to the parking problems was a bit less clear in its effectiveness. His perception of the emotions of his team - that parking issues were of concern -- was no doubt accurate. His understanding that if the problem was not dealt with it could get worse was also correct. Issues remained, however, and morale and productivity appeared to be suffering. To gain a better comprehension of the problem at this stage, it helps to learn a bit more about emotional intelligence.

Understanding Emotional Intelligence

The Mayer-Salovey Four-Branch model of emotional intelligence states that there are four branches of skills that are related to EI. These four branches and some of their interrelationships are shown in the diagram below.

The first two branches, Perception, and Facilitation, are termed "experiential EI," because they relate most closely to feelings. They involve, first, the capacity to perceive emotions in others accurately, and, second, the ability to use emotions to enhance how we think. When Jerry perceived concerns and anxieties in his team, he accurately perceived emotions among those around him. When he (presumably) used his own emotions to motivate his response to those concerns, he was effectively using his emotions to facilitate his thoughts and actions.

The third and fourth areas of EI skills are termed "strategic EI" because they pertain to calculating and planning with information about emotions. The third area, Understanding Emotions, involves knowing how emotions change, in and of themselves, as well as how they will change people and their behaviours over time. The fourth area, Emotional Management, focuses on how to integrate logic and emotion for effective decision-making. These four skill areas are related to one another, but they are functionally distinct as well. We know this from our research in ability-testing of EI, which has accompanied the scientific theory.

Our current test of EI is called the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, or MSCEIT. Jerry had taken the MSCEIT during the early portion of his executive coaching. The MSCEIT, like the Mayer-Salovey model upon which it is based, promotes a distinct and well-defined approach to studying EI. Rather than having people evaluate themselves (self-report method), or having others evaluate them (360 method), the MSCEIT is an ability test and asks people to solve emotion problems. For example, to assess Emotional Perception, the MSCEIT includes a task in which test-takers must identify emotions in faces and pictures. To assess Facilitating Thought, test-takers are asked what they think is the best emotion to feel when carrying out a task such as brain-storming. To measure Understanding Emotion, the MSCEIT includes questions about emotional vocabulary, how emotions blend together, and how emotions change over time. Finally, to test Emotional Management, the MSCEIT includes descriptions of socio-emotional situations, and

participants are asked to identify the best course of action to improve a feeling.

In Jerry's case, the results of the MSCEIT confirmed and clarified the issues involved in his leadership at that point in time. Jerry's scores on the Perceiving, Facilitating, and Understanding subscales were superb. That was no surprise: Jerry had accurately perceived his own, and Eddie Fontaine's, frustration and concern about the people on their team. He perceived that his group in Jersey City felt isolated and cut off from the rest of his team members (Perceiving Emotion). Jerry had used those feelings to focus on the immediate issues at hand: the details of the building, the parking, and so forth (Facilitating Thought). He understood the move could make them more than a little angry with him "for leaving them." He further understood that when people felt that way, their progression from irritation to frustration and then to anger, posed an enormous threat to the group's productivity and cohesiveness (Understanding Emotion).

Jerry's Emotional Management score, by contrast, was his lowest score on the MSCEIT. When Jerry looked at the diagram of the model and saw the profile of his scores, he had an "Aha!" experience - almost as if a cartoon light bulb had flickered on above his head. He realized that he had perceived and seen everything that was going on in his team, and yet, he had been unable to manage the emotions going on. Although Jerry knew full well that the *real* problem was his teams' feelings about the move, he had wrongly focused on the building, parking, and other concrete issues. When the coach and him discussed Emotional Management, Jerry smiled, nodded his head, and realized he needed to manage people's feelings, not the building and parking. It was time to identify and to solve the *real* problem, but Jerry was caught up in feelings of guilt and ineffectiveness. Such feelings may be useful in helping us to focus on details, but in this case, Jerry needed to engage in idea generation and inductive reasoning. Such creative thought processes are best facilitated by positive moods. His coach reminisced with Jerry about his many accomplishments and created a new tone for the meeting (displaying the use of Facilitating Thought). That brought Jerry out of his self-focused mood to adopt a more open, receptive point of view.

After more than hour of such thinking, Jerry decided to

move his office across the river two days each week. He would alternate the location of staff meetings. Jerry planned on having a "Welcome to Jersey!" housewarming party. The plan was gradually put into place. The complaints decreased and dwindled, productivity recovered. Jerry himself was not "cured": He still had a way of looking at the individual problems rather than the group of them together, and he needed to constantly remind himself to go beyond the facts and the logic of such situations when he managed them, to directly address the underlying feelings and emotions. An ability to address such concerns is, after all, one of the essentials of effective leadership.

Findings and claims about EI

The ability model of EI presented here is based on a careful theoretical development, coupled with empirical research. As already noted, once the popularized use of the term EI became unmoored from the basic meanings of emotion and intelligence, nearly any quality could be - and has been - referred to as Emotional Intelligence. Regrettably, almost any claim can be made about EI if the term is not clearly defined, since almost any research can be said to pertain to it. Unfortunately, many irresponsible claims have been made about the topic in various popularizations. These claims refer both to the size of the EI effect (e.g., "twice as important as IQ") and the areas of the EI effect (e.g., "virtually any area of life"). Our own position is much different: That EI is an important capability, but one that coexists with many other important strengths and weaknesses, and

People high in EI will build real social fabric within an organization, and between an organization and those it serves, whereas those low in EI may tend to create problems for the organization through their individual behaviours

that it affects some areas more than others.

One positive outcome of the popularizations of EI has been the enormous interest in research in the area. A growing body of literature examines the MSCEIT and its findings. These findings suggest that people high in EI form strong relations with others and have reliable support networks. Other people come to help these individuals in times of need. By contrast, people low in EI are socially perplexed, and are relatively more prone to drug and alcohol use, and to using aggressive and violent behaviour to solve problems. It is important to add that the vast majority of low EI scorers will not suffer from these more serious difficulties.

Empirical findings about leadership are only just being made public. Leaders who are high in EI may be better equipped to develop stronger teams, and to communicate more effectively with others. People high in EI will build real social fabric within an organization, and between an organization and those it serves, whereas those low in EI may tend to create problems for the organization through their individual behaviours. This story is still being written and we urge both researchers and practitioners to proceed knowing that new findings will continue to change and improve our understanding. The general data, however, suggest what EI can mean to individuals in organizations.

Developing emotionally intelligent leadership

The Four Branch model of EI, and the MSCEIT test based on it, provide us with a model of leadership and its development. The MSCEIT cuts right to the heart of a leader's underlying leadership skills, and the model offers a way to conceptualize and carry out strategic plans that incorporate emotions and emotional relationships in the workplace. For example, an overall plan might be to encourage existing customers to adopt a new product, with minimal defections to a competitor. This may demand a strategic plan that addresses both technical aspects - such as product quality, cost, and distribution - and emotional aspects, such as customer feelings toward the company. Carrying out the emotional aspects of such a plan can be organized according to the four-branch model of perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions. For example, perceiving emotions might involve surveying the feelings of customers. Using emotions might involve

making certain one is in the right frame of mind when tackling sensitive tasks. Understanding emotions may involve charting the emotional impact of various marketing plans on customers, while paying attention to an emotional bottom line, as well as to the financial one. Managing emotions may involve knowing how to lead so as to encourage desired emotional reactions associated with the plan. Some leaders are already excellent at such tasks. Others may seek and acquire training in the area, or rely upon the acumen of a trusted lieutenant.

The pivotal role of emotional intelligence

Do we believe that emotional intelligence is a core competency for management effectiveness? We believe it is one useful tool, but we also believe that there is more than one way to lead, and that certain situations call for EI more (or less) than others. An interim CEO who must enter a troubled organization and jettison major pieces of the company requires the cool-headedness of an aggressive surgeon. While there will be a lot of bad news, there may be little or no time to employ those skills, even if the CEO is high in EI. In many other cases, however, leaders lead not through rational, logical decision making alone, but by merging thinking with feelings. This is where EI skills may play a pivotal role.

Scientific research has uncovered a legitimate new human ability in emotional intelligence, and this has implications for the workforce. Jerry's situation, outlined earlier, is one example of how to use that skill. There are many other such stories we have studied (and participated in) as well. The stories are all different, but they all illustrate how technical and emotional factors work together in the workplace. They also illustrate how the manager who can think accurately and clearly about emotions, may often be in a better position to anticipate, cope with, and effectively manage change. ■