

# **Emotional Intelligence Related to University Students and Managers: A Qualitative Study**

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*Previous studies have discovered that learning to manage one's emotions in a positive way through emotional intelligence concepts will provide one with the ability to read other's emotions allowing one to interact positively and improve communications. This study represents the experiences as collected from the Management and the Students of one University as it relates to gaining and applying new knowledge related to Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace. The outcomes seem to support previous studies in that positive relationships between students as well as University management directly relates to using and improving emotional intelligence skills in the workplace.*

*Keywords: emotional intelligence, emotional quotient, DISCflex, communications, self-regard, self-awareness*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The management at a major established institution of education in the Southeast has worked hard to make positive changes to improve the atmosphere and overall operations of the organization and teach the concepts in a master's degree program. Upper management has realized the importance of focusing on emotional and social intelligence and using that knowledge to better the organization. The focus is on organizational behavior through educating leaders and students on emotional intelligence and the ability of leadership to grow in social intelligence. Emotional intelligence (EI) is understanding your own emotions and managing those emotions in positive ways (Suma, 2012). Social intelligence is the ability to tune in, read others, and the ability to know what others are feeling so that you can communicate effectively (Goleman, n.d.)

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effects of emotional and social intelligence theories that have already been implemented at a major University in the Southeast on both leadership and the student population that have gone through formal classes on the topic. Some questions to be addressed include: Has emotional intelligence training and education improved the leadership capabilities of the students and the management team at the University? Has this improved employee and student engagement and motivation? Has the teaching of emotional intelligence to students helped them to be more prepared for their current and future careers?

Through books and journal article reviews plus interviewing key members of the University leadership as well as reviewing archival data, the purpose here is to show the effect that emotional and social intelligence has made on this and other organizations from the literature review and data analysis.

## **THE LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

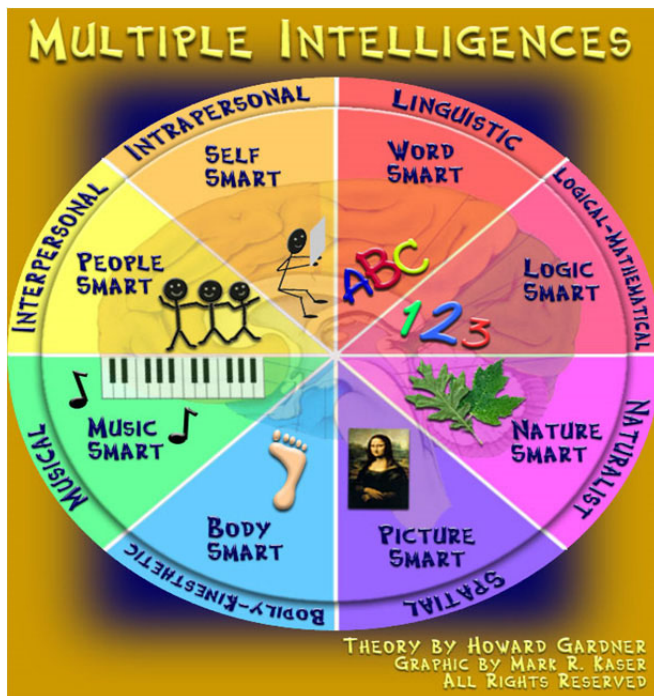
In the 1920s-1930s, Edward Thorndike presented his concept of social intelligence as the ability of getting along with other people (Cherry, n.d.; Bar-On, 2006). In the 1940s, David Wechsler presented effective components of intelligence as being essential to success in life. In 1986, Howard Gardner presented the concept of multiple intelligences. In 1990, Peter Salovey and John Mayer published the article “Emotional Intelligence”. In 1995, Daniel Goleman released his book “Emotional Intelligence: Why it can Matter more than IQ” (Cherry, n.d.).

The concept of emotional and social intelligence is nothing new; it has been discussed and investigated over several years. Some researchers and psychologists refer to emotional intelligence and social intelligence as two separate concepts while others link them together as emotional-social intelligence (ESI) (Bar-on, 2006). ESI is the ability “to effectively understand and express oneself, to understand and relate well with others, and to successfully cope with daily demands, challenges and pressures” (Bar-on, 2006, p. 3).

### **Components of Emotional Intelligence**

There are five components of emotional intelligence: Self-awareness – understanding ones emotions, monitoring them and controlling emotions; self-regulation – not allowing moods/impulses impact decision-making, think before acting; motivation – highly productive and have a passion to work; empathy – understanding others wants, needs and viewpoints, and being a good listener; and social skills – team player, manage relationships and help to develop others (Suma, 2012; Sonoma State University, 2009). In another source, it states that research findings are converging around a four-quadrant model: Awareness of own emotions; management of own emotions; awareness of others’ emotions; and management of others’ emotions (McShane & Von Glinow, 2013). Either set of components used (four or five), emotional intelligence is about being aware of your own emotions (how they affect yourself and others), being aware of others emotions (knowing how to manage those emotions), and using this information to build teams and relationships.

**FIGURE 1**  
**EI RELATED TO GARDNER AND MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES**



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As for the concept of emotional intelligence, it begins with Gardner’s (1986) concept of multiple intelligences as shown above in the illustration. The ones we are concerned with at this point in the conversation (even though they are all important in many ways) are the word-smart and logic-smart with are known as Intellectual Quotient or IQ. The self-smart and the people-smart are the underlying ideas behind Emotional Quotient. The Intrapersonal element is our own self-awareness and growth, and this is essential before we go out and work on the Interpersonal side of things as is further described in this paper. The makeup of these two aspects of the multiple intelligence model are the essence of what the thought leaders call EQ or EI which again which are noted above as the components of EI.

**Scientific Basics of Emotional Intelligence**

It turns out that there’s a subset of mirror neurons whose only job is to detect other people’s smiles and laughter, promoting smiles and laughter in return... a boss who laughs and sets an easygoing tone puts those neurons to work, triggering spontaneous laughter and knitting his team together in the process (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008, para. 8). Between the Amygdala where emotions are created near the brain stem and the pre-frontal lobes where we create thoughtful and intelligent responses, we have neural pathways. These neural pathways can be “hijacked” according to Goleman (2006), and when this happens all levels of sophistication in communications and relationship degrade very quickly. What follows is a link to a video the author has created to illustrate the workings of this idea (Forsyth, 2020, Intro to the EI Concepts and the Science Behind Emotional Intelligence).

**Economic Value-Added (EVA) and Emotional Intelligence**

Anyone with any sense is concerned about Return-On-Investment (ROI) and this should be no different; otherwise, we are not good stewards of our organizations whether they be educational, for-profit, not for-profit, etc. If it is not the bottom line, it is the budget or whatever other numbers the person who is taking on the responsibility of sponsoring such a program is accountable for. This is video created

from an article that was written as a result of a mega-analysis of economic return and investing in this type of program, whether it be for Students, Managers or Leaders at all levels, not to mention existing Employees (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Here is a video that the writer created that shares this article around this aspect of this EVA and its relationship to EI (Forsyth, 2020, EVA and EI Evidence Video).

### **The Potential Dark Side of Emotional Intelligence**

As discussed earlier, emotional intelligence is understanding your own emotions and managing them in positive ways. What happens if you do not manage your emotions in a positive way? A study was performed to determine how well individuals with high emotional intelligence could regulate their emotions. Part of the experiment identified individuals who “were motivated to manipulate others for their own personal gain” (Marsh, 2011, para. 7). Individuals with this trait are known as being Machiavellianism. Those with strong Machiavellian impulses and skilled at regulating their own emotions are more likely to treat others poorly (Marsh, 2011). Identifying, using, understanding, and managing your emotions in positive, constructive ways (instead of negatively manipulating individuals) will enable you to engage with others, drawing people to you (Suma, 2012).

## **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The population of this study consisted of a few upper level Managers and a significant number of students (20 or so) who are working professionals in highly professional and in executive positions. Out of those 20 or so, six student’s comments were used as a sample demonstrated below. The Managers interviewed all stated the training they got was excellent and very useful and they gave me examples of how they as Managers have used these concepts to work with the hiring of new people and then using the data from the instruments to have valid discussions about how different people can work together more effectively in the workplace. So far, the evidence by the comments made by all involved are looking very positive for both the utilization of an instrument like the DISCflex for helping to build EQ to improve performance and job satisfaction as is suggested in this study throughout the literature. This applies both as an employee and a student who is learning and applying these concepts at the same time as is evidenced in the comments below in the student comments area.

### **Instrumentation Used to Promote Emotional Intelligence Skill Building**

The goal of the DISCflex Leadership Assessment and Report is to provide the person with an understanding of how their natural behavior pattern affects their behavioral choices. It also provides them with a “language of behavior [which relates to the well-known area of EI]” to use as they develop themselves and others. Below you will find the components of the program as they relate to emotional intelligence.

The assessment questions relate to various situations and emotions that a leader deals with while at work. Once a leader completes a DISCflex Leadership assessment, the system generates a personalized report based on the choices made. The process of reading through the leader’s DISC report allows them to become self-aware of how they behave based on their self-perception. This relates directly to the self- awareness category of emotional intelligence.

The DISCflex program does allow the leader to have others take a short survey on them and provides them with info on how other people view their behaviors (Third Party inputs). The individual can categorize the other people’s perceptions into three perceptual lenses – co-workers, family, and others. This relates to the empathy category of emotional intelligence as the leader is better able to better understand how others view them.

The DISC Report is designed to help the leader flex and morph your behaviors so that you can become a “chameleon on a rainbow” and adapt to any situation. The program groups categories of behaviors into four quadrants’ and labels them as individual DISC factors. The leader’s personal results indicate how often the governing behavior is displayed and the report and eLearning help the leader self- regulate and build the ability to adapt and flex those behaviors. We see that this relates to

emotional intelligence as going through the DISC program allows leaders to work on self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and building social skills.

When looking at someone's DISC report they are provided with a DISC pattern, individual factor scores, and sub-factor scores. The DISC pattern gives a broad overview for easily identifying a leader's governing behaviors. When one peels back the onion and examines individual factor scores and the variances between each factor, then they can study the person's whole behavioral makeup. The factors and sub-factors scores provide metrics and a language around how you can look at someone's ability to build emotional intelligence. DISCflex was the instrument used in the course and with the management people mentioned here and is not used as part of the data collection or analysis for this study as this is qualitative in nature. This is only included for background reference only (Forsyth, Davis, Mitchell & Fryer, 2016).

### **Student Application Comments**

In this course, the students are asked to apply the different concepts in their workplace as part of their grade for the course and report out on what happened when they applied these concepts. What follows is a random series of actual comments from the students in the study. The overarching questions asked of the students when the course was over was as follows: "What have you learned during your practicum (on the job)?"

**Student One.** "I clearly understood what was needed out of my team and with my experience with my team members and understanding their EQ, I was able to communicate on the expectations clearly. Working in a new team is all about clear communication, the ability to build trust faster, lean on each other to share their expertise in a problem / crisis. This helps eliminate stress factor when one knows that we are all together in it for the success of the project than just acting like an individual contributor who are not focused on the bigger goal."

**Student Two.** "The main benefit that I reaped from this course and experience would be that my empathy towards from coworkers increased and I was able to look at the team and organization's vision from different points of view and this helped me become a better coworker and also a better person in general. The concept of social responsibility that was discussed in the curriculum was very useful in interacting with the local community and helping them with what we can do as a major organization for a town or a city. Some or all the things that were discussed during the course can be taken and be implemented in the real life too and doesn't necessarily have to stop in the workplace. This gives us a chance to improve not only our lives in the workplace and promote a better base to work out of, but also these principles or concepts can be adapted in the real life and could help us lead our lives in a more meaningful way where we see ourselves live in harmony with others."

**Student Three.** "As all the topics are regarding the workplace EQ[EI] there are numerous benefits with the concepts we learned in this subject. This ability to recognize and understand emotions of oneself and others is very important to grow as a good leader. I can say by this practicum I gained better teamwork experience, better office environment, more self-awareness and self-control, compassion, motivation and leadership capabilities. Now I am able to observe how to react to people, how to react to stressful situations, taking responsibility for the actions and how they affect others. As social skills are very important for high EQ!"

**Student Four.** "Overall, this class has also taught me valuable lessons on emotional intelligence. I aimed to create new neural pathways of higher emotional intelligence by feeding myself with desired positive behavior. By implementing these lessons at my workplace, I have contributed to the cause, excellency, vision, and mission of [company



social intelligence. “It is important to realize that only academic excellence is not enough to do well” (Suma, 2012, p. 59). It is not only important to teach reading, writing and arithmetic; individuals also need to be taught how to handle the many complexities of their emotional life. The skills that need to be taught include: The ability to reduce stress; recognizing and managing your emotions; connecting with others through verbal and nonverbal communication; learning to have fun through humor, laughter and play; learning to resolve conflicts positively (Suma, 2012). To be successful and live a more fulfilling life, it takes more than just your IQ, training, and experience. A person needs to be taught the skills associated with EI. This topic of emotional intelligence in the workplace continues to be proven to be an essential one and more Universities should have practically applied programs such as this one highlighted here where skills are put to use immediately in the work situations and they are part of the grading of the course.

### **Improving Leadership**

Companies are beginning to understand the importance of their leaders’ emotional intelligence – it is as important as technical skills and experience (Segal & Smith, 2014). To be a successful leader, one must understand his/her own emotional intelligence and use that knowledge in establishing relationships. “Expanding your self-awareness is the key to developing your emotional intelligence” (Wall, 2008, p. 29). How does one expand their self-awareness? Through other individual’s eyes. One way to expand your self-awareness is to ask for honest feedback from individuals you trust. Following are prompts suggested by Bob Wall (2008, p. 33).

- Describe two things about me that you most appreciate having in a manager (or coworker or subordinate).
- Give me two examples of behaviors or traits that I need to develop for me to be more effective.
- Give me two examples of times when my emotional reaction to something made me difficult to deal with.
- Describe any annoying habits or unconscious personal quirks that undermine my effectiveness.
- Describe anything I do that leaves people wondering whether I am unaware of the impact I have on people at work.

### **Using DISCflex in the Workplace**

Working in a positive environment is much more pleasant and productive than a negative environment. Leaders should learn to approach employees in a positive manner to be more receptive; learn and show true interest in the employees’ goals and aspirations; and create an atmosphere that will help them succeed. Leading is about developing a genuine interest and fostering positive feelings in those you lead (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). A socially intelligent leader will possess behaviors that include: Asking instead of talking; observing more and doing less; being more positive than negative in communications; and focusing more on others than yourself (Kolski-Anderson, 2010).

### **Teamwork**

Successful teamwork requires everyone to monitor and control their own emotions and be able to monitor others’ emotions to stay focused on and achieve the goals. They must be flexible and adapt to working in a cooperative environment. “Developing positive relationships where team members are aware of the impact their emotions can play on the effectiveness and success of the team should be the aim of each team member” (Luca & Tarricone, 2001, p. 370). Team members need to be able to deal with issues, feelings, and emotions, and apply conflict resolution. Building an emotional bond will have a positive effect on the overall success of a project.

### **Emotional Intelligence and the Bottom Line**

A business case was performed evaluating organizations and how emotional intelligence contributed to the bottom line (as illustrated above with EVA and EI). Many organizations have seen greater productivity and higher sales from employees with strong emotional intelligence competencies;

individuals selected on the basis of their emotional competence reduced turnover; leaders at a manufacturing plant received emotional intelligence training (learning better listening skills and conflict resolution) saw a reduction in lost-time accidents, grievances plus the plant exceeded its productivity goals (Cherniss, 1999). There are many examples of how the positive impact that emotional and social intelligence have on the bottom line.

## CONCLUSION

Emotional and social intelligence have been studied for many years. Understanding your own emotions and learning to manage those emotions in positive ways improves your own emotional intelligence. Learning to read others and know what others are feeling through social intelligence will help you communicate more effectively. Using emotional and social intelligence in the workplace improves the atmosphere and develops a trust with the employees. A person must have a constant awareness of their emotions, enabling them to keep their emotions intact. If an individual does not manage his/her emotions in a positive, constructive manner, they risk going to the dark side of emotional intelligence – those individuals that use their emotional intelligence to manipulate others.

The goal in this learning process is to improve the atmosphere and operations throughout the organization. Case studies have shown positive improvements in other organizations. As each leader learns and grows through the educational process of emotional and social intelligence, continued progress should be reflected in a more positive atmosphere and overall operations. The evidence shows that mastery of emotional intelligence in the workplace contributes to increased job satisfaction and productivity and there is nothing better than a positive work environment for employee retention (or turnover reduction) (Forsyth, Davis, Mitchell & Fryer, 2016).

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