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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was prepared at the request of the line manager to explain the role of mindfulness and emotional intelligence (EI) in the workplace, and to explore how EI can be considered when recruiting employees from different generations. The report is based on recognised EI models and supported by recent academic sources.

The first part of the report critically evaluates how employees use emotional intelligence at work. EI supports communication, teamwork, leadership, stress management and performance. Models such as Goleman's framework highlight self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and social skills as essential competencies for effective working relationships. Although EI is linked to higher engagement and collaboration, the report also recognises limitations, including measurement challenges, cultural differences and the risk of unequal emotional labour. EI should therefore be developed alongside supportive systems, fair workload and ethical leadership.

The second part of the report examines generational differences. Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z each show distinctive EI strengths. Generation X often brings emotional stability and independence, Millennials contribute collaboration and feedback, and Generation Z demonstrates empathy, inclusivity and a focus on wellbeing. Understanding these patterns helps managers recruit fairly and build balanced teams.

The report concludes with key recommendations: include EI within recruitment and selection, provide training and mentoring, create psychologically safe environments, offer tailored support for each generation, and evaluate the impact of EI initiatives. Integrating EI into everyday practice will help the organisation strengthen communication, improve teamwork and support sustainable performance.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become a crucial skill for success in modern organisations. The workplace is increasingly complex, fast-paced and diverse, and employees are required to understand and manage emotions effectively to collaborate, solve problems and perform well. As Daniel Goleman argues, people who are unaware of their own emotional experience often struggle to understand the emotions of others, which affects relationships and outcomes at work (Goleman, 1998). Therefore, EI is not only a personal competency but an organisational necessity.

This report was requested by my line manager after observing the development of my EI in a recent presentation. The report will help the Senior Management Team understand the importance of emotional intelligence and mindfulness in the workplace, and how these ideas relate to recruitment and management. It focuses on two key areas. First, it critically evaluates how employees use EI at work, using recognised EI models and supported by recent academic sources. Second, it explores unique characteristics of generational groups—Generation X, Y and Z—and discusses how managers may need to consider emotional intelligence when recruiting from different age groups.

The report concludes with recommendations for how organisations can develop EI and create supportive cultures where employees from all generations are able to thrive. By improving emotional intelligence across the workforce, organisations can enhance collaboration, leadership, performance and long-term success.

1. CRITICAL EVALUATION: HOW EMPLOYEES USE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become a key concept in organisational behaviour because it shapes how employees think, communicate and respond to others. This section critically evaluates how EI is used at work by examining the main models, explaining how EI appears in everyday behaviour, and discussing strengths and limitations.

1.1 EI models and workplace relevance

Goleman's (1998) mixed model is widely used because it translates emotional concepts into workplace competencies. His five elements—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills—are often used in recruitment, leadership programmes and performance reviews (Cherniss, 2010). These components help explain why some employees work calmly under pressure, resolve conflict, or support others effectively.

A limitation of this model is that it overlaps with personality traits, such as optimism or sociability, making it difficult to measure precisely (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2016). Ability-based models, such as the MSCEIT, use cognitive testing to measure emotional problem-solving more scientifically, but these tools are expensive and less practical for everyday HR use (Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez, 2023). For organisations, the advantage of mixed models is that they treat EI as a skill that can be developed, enabling learning and coaching rather than assuming EI is fixed.

1.2 EI in communication and relationships

The clearest use of EI in work is communication. Employees constantly read emotional cues such as tone, body language and silence. Someone with high EI notices when colleagues are stressed, upset or disengaged, and responds appropriately. Research shows that EI is associated with stronger relationships and fewer misunderstandings (Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez, 2023). By listening carefully and adjusting communication, emotionally intelligent employees reduce conflict and create psychological safety.

However, emotional labour can become invisible. People who naturally support others may do extra emotional work without recognition, often women or minority staff (Miller et al.,

2020). This shows EI must be shared fairly, not assumed to be the responsibility of a few “empathetic” individuals.

1.3 EI and teamwork

Teamwork depends on EI because teams contain different personalities, expectations and emotional styles. Meta-analysis confirms that EI improves teamwork and collaboration, as members with high EI read group dynamics accurately and adjust their behaviour (Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez, 2023). They may encourage quieter voices, slow down heated discussions, or help the group stay focused.

In practice, emotionally intelligent behaviour often emerges informally. Someone may notice tension and gently redirect a conversation without being asked. These subtle actions support the group, even though they are not part of formal job descriptions. For this reason, EI is often a hidden driver of successful collaboration and engagement.

1.4 EI in leadership and change

Leaders with EI create trust because they understand their own emotions and recognise how others feel (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2013). During change or uncertainty, they acknowledge anxiety, offer support and communicate openly. This kind of leadership improves commitment and resilience (Edmondson, 2019).

However, the relationship between EI and leadership performance is not absolute. Studies show that EI explains only part of leadership success (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2016). Technical skills, ethics and decision-making remain essential. Therefore, EI should be considered as a complement, not a replacement, for knowledge and competence.

1.5 EI, stress and resilience

Work is emotional, especially when employees face deadlines, complaints or conflict. EI supports resilience because people with self-awareness recognise emotional triggers early and use healthy coping strategies (Chaskalson and McMordie, 2019). Self-regulation helps employees stay calm and avoid reacting impulsively, while empathy enables colleagues to support each other. Employees with these skills are more engaged and less likely to burn out (Martins, Ramalho and Morin, 2010).

However, it is important not to place all responsibility on the employee. If organisations push emotional management without addressing workload or culture, EI can be used as a coping tool for unhealthy systems (Miller et al., 2020). Stress management must be shared through fair policies and leadership, not left only to individuals.

1.6 EI and performance

EI supports performance because emotions shape motivation and decision-making. Employees who regulate emotions tend to persevere, stay optimistic and align their work with personal values (Amissah-Wilson et al., 2025). In creative and knowledge-based roles, EI encourages curiosity and constructive disagreement. This allows teams to challenge ideas without damaging relationships, which improves innovation (Edmondson, 2019).

Nevertheless, not every role requires high EI. Some technical or analytical positions rely more on individual focus than relationship-building. Over-emphasising EI in hiring for these roles may encourage selection based on likeability rather than skill (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2016). A balanced approach is required.

1.7 Mindfulness as a support for EI

Mindfulness strengthens EI by helping employees recognise emotions before reacting. Mindfulness training allows individuals to observe thoughts and feelings with clarity, creating space to choose a constructive response (Chaskalson and McMordie, 2019). This supports self-awareness and self-regulation, making EI practical rather than theoretical.

Research shows that mindfulness reduces stress and improves empathy (Lomas et al., 2017). However, mindfulness programmes can be used superficially if the organisation does not also address workload and culture (Purser, 2019). Ethical use of mindfulness requires both individual practice and supportive environments.

1.8 Limitations and critical issues

Several limitations need to be considered:

- Measurement difficulties: EI tools measure different things and do not always agree (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2016).

- Context matters: What counts as emotionally intelligent in one culture or industry may not in another.
- Manipulation risk: Interpersonal skills can be used unethically, sometimes called “dark EI” (Côté and Hideg, 2011).
- Unequal emotional labour: Some employees may be expected to manage others’ emotions without recognition (Miller et al., 2020).

These points show that EI should be supported by fair systems, ethical leadership and shared responsibility.

2. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND RECRUITMENT ACROSS GENERATIONS

The modern workplace is multi-generational. Employees from Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z work side by side, often in the same teams, on the same projects, and reporting to each other in different directions. Each generation has grown up in different economic, technological and cultural environments, which has shaped how they communicate, how they deal with stress, and how they express emotions. For this reason, emotional intelligence (EI) is not experienced in the same way across generations. In recruitment, managers need to understand what each generation brings emotionally, otherwise organisations risk hiring in ways that create misunderstanding, dissatisfaction or high turnover.

2.1 Generational characteristics and emotional intelligence

Generational research is sometimes criticised for stereotyping, but it remains useful when viewed as broad tendencies rather than fixed labels (Oxford Group, 2023). EI does not belong to one generation more than another; instead, different generations show different strengths and preferences in how they use EI (Tomar and Sharma, 2025). The key point for recruitment is that EI is expressed differently, so managers must recognise these patterns to hire fairly and effectively.

Generation X (1965–1980)

Generation X entered the workforce before the rise of digital technology, in an era that emphasised self-reliance, competition, and job security. They often value independence, autonomy and practical problem-solving (Oxford Group, 2023). Research suggests they tend to show EI through emotional self-regulation and resilience, rather than outward emotional expression (Praveen, Peri and Labde, 2025).

They are often described as emotionally steady: they remain calm during pressure, recover quickly from setbacks, and prefer to separate emotions from work decisions. This is an EI strength, especially in leadership roles or high-stress environments.

However, a critical perspective is needed. Because they are comfortable working independently, some may appear emotionally distant to younger colleagues who prefer open dialogue and feedback (Tomar and Sharma, 2025). In recruitment, this is not a weakness but a style difference. Managers should focus on what Generation X does well: accountability, realism, and emotional control, while exploring whether they are willing to adapt communication for multi-generational teams.

Generation Y / Millennials (1981–1996)

Millennials experienced rapid globalisation and the rise of online communication. They value teamwork, inclusion, and continuous feedback (Tomar and Sharma, 2025). In EI terms, Millennials often perform strongly in social skills, empathy and adaptability. They are comfortable expressing emotions, asking questions, and building relationships across organisations.

This can be a great asset. Teams with Millennials often benefit from open communication and psychological safety, because they normalise emotional expression in the workplace. They want work to be meaningful, and they tend to respond well to leaders who show empathy and explain decisions transparently (Edmondson, 2019).

However, there are challenges. If a workplace does not offer feedback or appreciation, Millennials may feel undervalued and disengage quickly. Research shows that their motivation and performance are strongly linked to emotional connection and a sense of purpose (Suyanto, Ilham and Syamlan, 2025). In recruitment, managers should emphasise development, clarity of expectations and opportunities for collaboration.

Generation Z (1997 onwards)

Generation Z has grown up entirely in a digital world. They are comfortable with instant communication, constant change and high connectivity. Studies show that Gen Z employees often demonstrate strong EI in empathy, social awareness and inclusivity, especially when compared to older generations (Praveen, Peri and Labde, 2025). They tend to value authenticity, mental health and emotional openness. These priorities shape how they choose employers.

Gen Z expects emotionally supportive leadership, psychological safety, and the freedom to discuss well-being. They are highly motivated when workplaces respect individuality and diversity (British Council, 2024). Their communication style may appear casual or emotional, but it reflects genuine connection and care for relationships.

However, Gen Z may lack the emotional resilience that comes from long experience. Many have entered the workforce during economic instability, the pandemic, and rapid change. Some studies show higher rates of stress, anxiety, and burnout among Gen Z because emotional overload is more common (British Council, 2024). They may also rely on technology to manage difficult conversations. HR reports have found that some Gen Z employees use AI tools to interpret tone, plan responses, or avoid emotional conflict (HR Dive, 2024). This is not necessarily negative, but it indicates that digital mediation is now part of emotional intelligence.

2.2 Recruitment implications for each generation

Recruitment is not just about hiring skills; it is about finding emotional fit for roles, teams and leadership styles. Managers need to consider both EI strengths and EI support needs.

Hiring Generation X

When recruiting Generation X, the organisation should:

- emphasise autonomy, responsibility and trust
- respect their experience and self-reliance
- focus on EI strengths such as self-regulation and stability

Interview questions could explore how they handle long-term stress, conflict or organisational change. Instead of expecting them to “share emotions”, managers should look

for evidence of calm leadership and emotional restraint, which can be a stabilising force during uncertainty.

Hiring Millennials

Millennials tend to thrive in environments that offer:

- collaboration and cross-functional teamwork
- feedback and recognition
- opportunities for development

Recruitment should explore how candidates build relationships, ask for support, and respond to feedback. Managers should not assume that emotional expressiveness is a weakness; it is often an asset, linked to empathy, motivation and team cohesion (Tomar and Sharma, 2025).

Hiring Generation Z

For Generation Z, recruitment should:

- show a commitment to mental health, inclusion and well-being
- offer coaching, mentoring and career clarity
- provide psychological safety and open feedback

Their emotional strengths are empathy and social awareness, but organisations must help build resilience through realistic expectations and supportive leadership (Suyanto, Ilham and Syamlan, 2025). Managers should ask about how candidates deal with pressure, ambiguity and emotional overload, not to exclude them, but to prepare development plans.

2.3 Multi-generational EI as an organisational advantage

A critical insight is that generational differences should not be treated as problems. When managed well, they create complementary emotional strengths.

- Generation X contributes emotional stability, patience and realism.
- Millennials bring collaboration, engagement and communication.
- Generation Z adds empathy, inclusivity and innovation.

Mixed teams can therefore benefit from Emotional Diversity: different emotional styles produce creative tension, broader perspectives and better decision-making, provided leaders support psychological safety (Edmondson, 2019).

However, without EI, these differences can cause misunderstanding. For example:

- Generation X may view Gen Z as oversensitive.
- Gen Z may view Generation X as emotionally detached.
- Millennials may feel “stuck in the middle”.

EI enables employees to interpret the emotional style of others, instead of judging or resenting it. Recruitment must therefore consider not only cultural fit but cross-generational emotional fit.

2.4 Critical reflection on EI in recruitment

There are important risks:

1. Bias: If recruiters favour one emotional style, they may unintentionally discriminate against other generations.
2. Over-emphasis: Hiring based only on EI may ignore technical capability.
3. Emotional labour: Younger employees may be asked to provide emotional support without recognition.

As Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2016) argue, EI must be considered alongside skills, ethics and experience. Recruitment should therefore emphasise balance: a mix of emotional competencies and job-specific abilities.

CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence has become a central aspect of modern organisational life. It affects how employees communicate, manage stress, collaborate with others and adapt to change. Through the critical evaluation in this report, it is clear that emotionally intelligent behaviour is closely linked to trust, motivation, psychological safety and workplace performance. Models such as Goleman’s framework show that self-awareness, empathy, social skills and

self-regulation are skills that can be learned and strengthened, rather than fixed traits. When employees develop these skills, they become more effective team members and leaders.

Generational differences do not reduce emotional intelligence, but they influence how EI is expressed. Generation X often brings emotional stability and independence, Millennials contribute collaboration and communication, and Generation Z brings empathy, inclusivity and an interest in mental wellbeing. These differences create valuable emotional diversity in teams, provided organisations support understanding and respect.

Overall, EI is not a replacement for technical skills but a complementary element that helps people work together successfully. Organisations that recognise the emotional needs of different generations and invest in EI development will be better positioned to improve engagement, reduce conflict and increase performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen emotional intelligence within the organisation and improve recruitment, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Integrate EI into recruitment and selection processes

Recruitment should go beyond technical qualifications. Behavioural interview questions, case scenarios and group exercises should be used to assess key EI skills such as empathy, adaptability, self-regulation and communication. Mixed-age interview panels are recommended to reduce potential generational bias and ensure that different emotional styles are fairly interpreted.

2. Provide training and development opportunities

The organisation should offer regular EI and mindfulness training to all staff. Workshops could focus on self-awareness, active listening, conflict management and emotional regulation. Coaching and mentoring should be available to support employees from different generations as they adjust to workplace expectations and build resilience. Leadership

training should emphasise emotionally intelligent behaviours, as leaders set the tone for organisational culture.

3. Create a psychologically safe environment

EI cannot develop in a culture where employees fear speaking up. Managers should encourage respectful communication, open feedback and constructive disagreement. Emotional labour should be recognised rather than silently expected. When emotional support is shared fairly, individuals are less likely to experience burnout or frustration.

4. Tailor support to generational needs

Different generations express emotional intelligence differently. Generation X may value autonomy and clarity, Millennials often appreciate collaboration and regular feedback, while Generation Z benefits from wellbeing support, coaching and clear career pathways. Tailoring communication and management styles will help each group thrive.

5. Monitor and evaluate EI initiatives

The organisation should track outcomes such as engagement, staff turnover and wellbeing to evaluate the impact of EI development. Feedback from employees should be used to refine practices. Succession planning should also consider EI, so that future leaders are chosen not only for technical expertise but also for empathy, communication and emotional maturity.

By embedding emotional intelligence into everyday practice, the organisation can build stronger relationships, improve teamwork and support long-term success.

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