



21/03/2026

A Critical Evaluation of Emotional Intelligence and Generational Dynamics in the Workplace



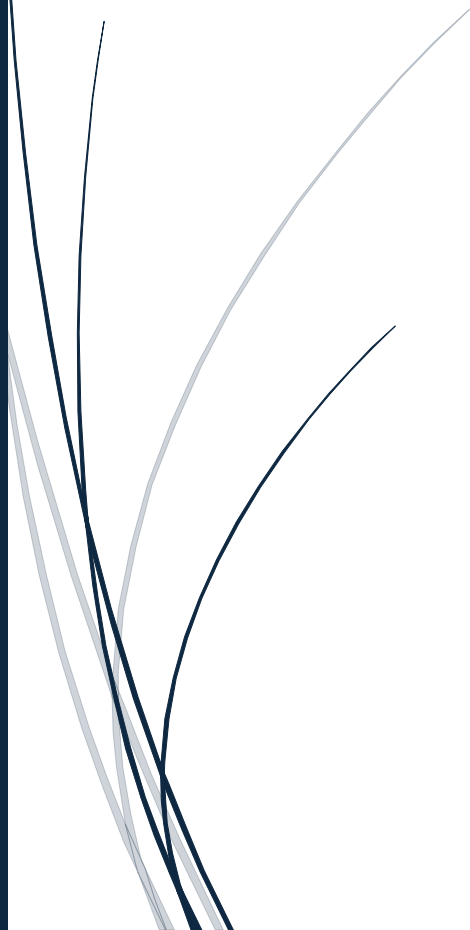
NAME: ANA PAULA DI CUNTO

STUDENT ID: 2334818

MODULE: DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE SKILLS

MODULE CODE: LCLM5006_LON

LECTURE: KAZEEM OSENI



Ana Paula dc
[COMPANY NAME]

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Critical Evaluation of Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace	2
3. Unique Characteristics for Recruitment: Managing Generational Gaps	7
4. The Interplay of Emotional Intelligence and Generational Dynamics	10
5. Personal Application and Strategic Recommendations	12
6. Conclusion	13
7. References	14

1. Introduction

In an increasingly complex and interconnected business environment, technical expertise alone is no longer a sufficient predictor of professional success or effective leadership. The ability to navigate one's own internal landscape and the interpersonal dynamics of a team has emerged as a critical competency. As Daniel Goleman (1995) aptly stated, “If you are tuned out of your own emotions, you will be poor at reading them in other people.” This principle lies at the heart of Emotional Intelligence (EI), a concept that has garnered significant attention for its profound impact on workplace productivity, communication, and culture. This report is commissioned in response to feedback regarding the enhanced application of EI skills and aims to critically evaluate the practical application of EI components in the workplace. Furthermore, it will explore the unique characteristics of generational cohorts, Generations X, Y, and Z that managers must consider for effective recruitment and team cohesion. Finally, this report will synthesise the critical relationship between EI and generational differences, highlighting both the synergies and potential friction points, and conclude with actionable recommendations for the organisation. By undertaking this analysis, this report will also serve to demonstrate a personal commitment to leveraging EI knowledge for future professional development.

2. Critical Evaluation of Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has evolved through diverse theoretical frameworks, each providing a unique perspective on its professional utility. The **Ability Model**, developed by Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2016), categorizes EI as a discrete set of cognitive capacities. These include the ability to accurately perceive, utilize, comprehend, and regulate emotions as a form of information processing.

In contrast, the **Mixed Model**, championed by Goleman (1995), adopts a broader view by integrating cognitive abilities with personality traits and competencies. This model emphasizes five core pillars: self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills positioning them as essential drivers of high job performance. Within the organizational environment, staff can strategically apply these various components to overcome professional obstacles and foster a more collaborative workplace culture.

Comparison of Primary Emotional Intelligence Models

Feature	Ability Model (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey)	Mixed Model (Daniel Goleman)
Core Definition	A strictly cognitive intelligence.	A blend of traits and competencies.
Primary Focus	Processing emotional information.	Impact on leadership and performance.
Key Components	4 Branches: Perceiving, Using, Understanding, and Managing emotions.	5 Pillars: Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Motivation, Empathy, Social Skills.
Workplace Goal	Enhancing objective emotional logic.	Improving interpersonal and self-management skills.

Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation: Foundations of Professionalism.

According to Goleman (1995), self-awareness—the capacity to recognize one’s emotions and their subsequent impact—serves as the fundamental cornerstone of Emotional Intelligence (EI). In a professional context, this allows individuals to accurately identify internal stressors, such as frustration during high-pressure assignments, before they manifest externally.

The Mechanism of Self-Regulation

Once an emotion is identified, **self-regulation** enables the individual to manage that feeling rather than reacting impulsively. This transition from recognition to management is vital for maintaining workplace stability. (Salameh-Ayanian et al., 2025)

- **Recognition:** Identifying physiological or psychological cues (e.g., rising anxiety before a presentation).
- **Intervention:** Employing cognitive or physical techniques, such as reframing perspectives or controlled breathing.

- **Outcome:** Preventing reactive behaviours such as interpersonal conflict or erratic decision-making to preserve professional composure.

Theoretical Alignment

It is essential to distinguish between suppressing emotions and managing actions. This nuance aligns with the "**management of emotion**" branch within Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model of emotional intelligence. Rather than ignoring the emotional state, the individual proactively governs the resulting behavior, ensuring that professional conduct remains consistent regardless of internal pressures.

Building on the foundation of self-awareness and self-regulation, Goleman's model includes three additional components that translate internal management into external professional success.

1. Internal Motivation

Beyond financial rewards or status, highly emotionally intelligent professionals are driven by an inner passion for their work. This manifests as:

- **Strong Achievement Drive:** A constant desire to improve and meet high standards of excellence.
- **Optimism:** The ability to remain resilient and persistent even when facing setbacks or project failures.
- **Commitment:** Aligning personal goals with the broader objectives of the organization.

2. Empathy

In a report context, empathy is defined as the ability to understand the emotional makeup of others and treat them according to their emotional reactions.

- **Cross-Cultural Sensitivity:** Navigating diverse perspectives in a globalized workforce.
- **Talent Development:** Recognizing others' needs for growth and providing constructive feedback.
- **Social Awareness:** Sensing office "undercurrents" and understanding how decisions will impact team morale.

3. Social Skills (Relationship Management)

This is the culmination of the other dimensions. It involves moving people in desired directions, whether through influence or conflict management.

- **Effective Communication:** Delivering messages that are clear, persuasive, and emotionally resonant.
- **Change Management:** Identifying the need for change and removing barriers to implementation.
- **Collaboration:** Fostering a "team-first" mentality that leverages the collective intelligence of the group.

Summary of the Five-Pillar Model

Pillar	Focus	Result in Professional Conduct
Self-Awareness	Internal	Identifying personal triggers before they cause a scene.
Self-Regulation	Internal	Maintaining cool-headedness under tight deadlines.
Motivation	Internal	Maintaining high productivity without constant external supervision.
Empathy	External	Validating a colleague's concerns to build trust.
Social Skills	External	Resolving a dispute between team members efficiently.

The Utilisation of Emotion for Problem-Solving.

A more advanced application of EI is the strategic use of emotion to facilitate cognitive processes. Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model includes the 'utilisation of emotion' branch, which involves harnessing emotions to enhance problem-solving and decision-making. For example, a creative team might deliberately induce a state of playful, positive affect during a brainstorming session to encourage innovative thinking, recognising that positive emotions broaden cognitive flexibility (Fredrickson, 2001). Conversely, a project manager reviewing a high-risk financial model might consciously adopt a more serious, analytical mindset, understanding that a mildly negative or critical emotional state can enhance focus and attention to detail. This sophisticated use of emotion demonstrates a deep integration of EI, moving beyond mere interpersonal interaction to cognitive optimisation. However, a critical evaluation reveals that such advanced application is rare and requires a level of emotional literacy that may not be present in all employees, highlighting the need for targeted training rather than assuming these skills are innate.

Critical Limitations of EI in the Workplace

Despite its benefits, the application of EI has its critics. A significant concern is the potential for the manipulation of EI skills. An individual with high social skills and empathy could, in theory, use these abilities for personal gain, such as manipulating a colleague's emotions to take credit for work or to undermine a rival. This 'dark side' of EI suggests that competence in these areas must be underpinned by a strong ethical framework and organisational integrity (Grant, 2014). Furthermore, overreliance on empathy can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout, particularly in helping professions or roles that require constant conflict resolution (Hülsheger et al., 2013). Employees who are overly attuned to the negative emotions of others without adequate self-regulation strategies can experience 'empathic distress', which diminishes their own well-being and effectiveness. Therefore, a critical implementation of EI principles must include boundaries and a focus on compassion, which involves concern for others without necessarily absorbing their distress over pure empathy (Klimecki and Singer, 2012).

3. Unique Characteristics for Recruitment: Managing Generational Gaps

To build an effective work environment, managers must move beyond a one-size-fits-all recruitment strategy and develop an acute awareness of the generational differences that shape employee expectations, motivations, and communication styles. While acknowledging the risks of stereotyping, understanding the formative experiences of Generations X, Y, and Z provides a valuable framework for creating an inclusive and productive workplace (Twenge, 2010).

Key Generational Drivers

Generation	Primary Workplace Value	Communication Preference	Recruitment Hook
Gen X	Autonomy & Work-Life Balance	Direct & Efficient	Independent projects; stability
Gen Y (Millennials)	Purpose & Growth	Collaborative & Frequent	Professional development; culture
Gen Z	Diversity & Digital Integration	Visual & Instant	Tech-forward tools; social impact

3.1 Generation X: The Independent Pragmatists (c. 1965–1980)

Members of Generation X were often shaped by shifting family dynamics and economic volatility during their formative years. Frequently labeled the **"latchkey" generation**, this cohort developed a strong sense of self-reliance and a preference for individual agency. In a professional context, this translates to a high premium placed on **independence and work-life balance** (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Recruitment & Management Implications

To successfully attract and retain Gen X talent, hiring managers should pivot toward a results-based culture rather than a process-heavy one. Key considerations include:

- **Skepticism of Hierarchy:** Gen X professionals tend to be wary of traditional authority and "grandiose" corporate mission statements. They prefer transparency and direct, no-nonsense communication.
- **Autonomy over Oversight:** They are highly motivated by the freedom to manage their own workflows. Micromanagement is often a primary driver of disengagement for this group.
- **Practical Growth:** While they value professional development, they often prefer acquiring new skills through practical application rather than through formal, top-down mentoring programs.
- **Efficiency First:** Their characteristic pragmatism makes them naturally averse to excessive bureaucracy or redundant meetings.

Strategic Alignment: When recruiting Gen X candidates, organizations should emphasize **flexibility** and **results-oriented metrics**. Highlighting the "what" (the goal) rather than dictating the "how" (the process) is the most effective way to secure their commitment.

3.2 Generation Y (Millennials): The Purpose-Driven Collaborators (c. 1981–1996)

Entering the labor market amidst the digital revolution and the global financial crisis, Millennials developed distinct perspectives on professional security and workplace collaboration. This cohort is characterized by a search for meaningful employment, a desire for a sense of community, and a requirement for consistent feedback (Mahmoud, Fuxman and Mohr, 2021).

To recruit and retain Millennials effectively, managers should emphasize:

- **Organizational Values:** Highlighting corporate social responsibility (CSR) and robust diversity and inclusion initiatives is essential.
- **Coaching over Command:** Unlike the autonomous preference of Gen X, Millennials favor a mentorship-based management style, preferring ongoing constructive dialogue over traditional annual performance reviews.
- **Growth and Integration:** They seek rapid professional development and environments where work is an extension of their personal identity rather than a detached obligation.

However, management must navigate potential intergenerational friction; the Millennial desire for frequent recognition and accelerated progression can sometimes be interpreted as "entitlement" by older colleagues who adhere to tenure-based advancement (Twenge, 2023).

3.3 Generation Z: The Digital Natives (c. 1997–2012)

As the first generation to mature with ubiquitous internet and social media, Generation Z's worldview has been shaped by global instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, they are often more pragmatic and financially cautious than their predecessors, placing a high premium on authenticity and individual expression (Chillakuri, 2020).

Key recruitment drivers for this demographic include:

- **Seamless Digital Integration:** Gen Z expects workplace technology to be sophisticated and foundational to all operations.
- **Stability and Skill-Building:** Despite an entrepreneurial spirit, they value job security and look for roles that offer immediate skill acquisition and visible impact.
- **Identity-Centric Culture:** Similar to Millennials, they thrive in cultures where work aligns with their personal values and provides clear pathways for upward mobility.

Managers must remain mindful that the desire for **swift advancement** and **regular validation** shared by Generation Z and Millennials can fundamentally challenge traditional workplace norms, potentially creating tension with generations that prioritize long-term loyalty and seniority (Twenge, 2023).

4. The Interplay of Emotional Intelligence and Generational Dynamics

The relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and generational diversity is a dual-edged sword, serving as both a source of organizational synergy and a catalyst for interpersonal conflict. For leadership, the primary challenge lies in bridging these cognitive and emotional gaps to leverage the unique strengths of a multigenerational workforce.

4.1. Complementary Strengths: Synergy Through Diversity

When managed effectively, generational differences create a "composite EI" that is more robust than that of a homogenous team.

- **Generation X (Stability):** Rooted in self-reliance, Gen X often demonstrates high levels of **self-regulation** and independence. Their pragmatic approach acts as an emotional anchor, providing stability and focus during high-pressure crises.
- **Millennials (Collaboration):** Characterized by high **empathy** and advanced **social skills**, Millennials excel at fostering inclusion. Their collaborative background makes them adept at breaking down departmental silos and building community.
- **Generation Z (Digital Awareness):** As digital natives, Gen Z possesses a specialized form of **situational awareness**. They are uniquely skilled at interpreting emotional cues in virtual environments, an essential EI component for the modern hybrid workplace (Gentina and Parry, 2020).

Recognizing these varied EI profiles allows a team to exhibit a more holistic collective intelligence, where the strengths of one cohort mitigate the vulnerabilities of another.

4.2. Friction and Misinterpretation: The Empathy Gap

Conversely, generational lenses can lead to "emotional misattribution," where behaviors are judged based on the observer's own generational norms rather than the actor's intent.

Generational Interaction	Potential Misinterpretation	EI Component at Risk
Gen X Manager → Millennial	Direct, brief communication may be viewed as dismissive or uncaring.	Empathy
Millennial → Gen X Manager	Requests for consensus/context may be viewed as "needy" or inefficient.	Self-Motivation
Gen Z → Older Cohorts	Firm work-life boundaries may be misread as disengagement or lack of commitment.	Social Skill

This friction rarely stems from a fundamental lack of EI; rather, it represents a failure to apply **contextual empathy**. As Goleman (1995) suggests, being "tuned out" of the formative experiences of others, such as Gen Z's focus on mental health following parental burnout, leads to an inability to accurately read their motivations.

Success in a multigenerational environment requires moving beyond one's own "default" emotional setting to acknowledge how historical and social contexts shape the professional behaviors of others.

5. Personal Application and Strategic Recommendations

This section outlines the practical application of Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory to individual professional development and broader organizational strategy. By viewing EI not as a static trait, but as a dynamic, trainable competency, both individuals and organizations can achieve greater interpersonal efficacy.

Recommendations for the Organisation:

1. **Develop a Common EI Language:** Implement a training programme based on a single, clear framework (such as Goleman's Mixed Model) to create a shared vocabulary for discussing emotions, performance, and leadership expectations across all departments.
2. **Reverse Mentoring Programme:** Establish a formal reverse mentoring scheme pairing senior leaders (often Gen X) with junior employees (Gen Z). This allows for a structured exchange where Gen Z can share insights on digital agility and new collaboration tools, while leaders can share strategic business acumen. This directly fosters the EI competency of perspective-taking across generations.
3. **Integrate EI into Recruitment and Onboarding:** To ensure long-term cultural cohesion, EI should be embedded into the core stages of the employee lifecycle:
 - **Recruitment:** Interview processes should be refined to include behavioral and situational judgment tests (SJT) that specifically assess for **self-regulation** and **empathy**. By identifying candidates who prioritize team dynamics over individual output, the organization can build a more resilient workforce (Cherniss, 2010).
 - **Onboarding:** New hire orientation should include specialized modules regarding the organization's **generational makeup**. Proactively managing expectations about varying communication styles (e.g., directness vs. consensus-building) can pre-emptively mitigate interpersonal friction and accelerate the social integration of new employees (Kotsou et al., 2019).

6. Conclusion

Emotional intelligence is not merely a 'soft skill' but a critical determinant of individual and organisational effectiveness (Goleman, 1998). Employees who master its components from self-awareness and self-regulation to empathy and social skill are better equipped to navigate complexity, collaborate effectively, and foster a resilient workplace culture. However, the application of EI must be critically examined to guard against its potential for manipulation and burnout. In parallel, the modern workplace is defined by the presence of multiple generations, each with distinct characteristics shaped by their unique historical and social contexts. For managers, effective recruitment and team development require a nuanced understanding of these generational differences. The critical intersection lies in recognising that generational gaps can either undermine or enhance EI practice. When managers and employees fail to apply empathy and social skill in a way that accounts for generational context, friction ensues. Conversely, when a multigenerational workforce is approached with a spirit of learning and mutual respect, the diverse EI strengths of each cohort can combine to create a more emotionally intelligent, adaptive, and high-performing organisation.

7. References

1. Cherniss, C. (2010) 'Emotional intelligence: Toward clarification of a concept', *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 110-126.
2. Chillakuri, B. (2020) 'Understanding Generation Z expectations for effective onboarding', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 33(7), pp. 1277–1296.
3. Fredrickson, B.L. (2001) 'The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions', *American Psychologist*, 56(3), pp. 218-226.
4. Gentina, E. and Parry, E. (2020) *The Next Generation of Women in STEM: A Multigenerational Perspective*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
5. Goleman, D. (1995) *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.
6. Goleman, D. (1998) *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books
7. Grant, A. (2014) 'The dark side of emotional intelligence', *The Atlantic*, 2 January. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/01/the-dark-side-of-emotional-intelligence/282720/> (Accessed: 20 March 2026).
8. Hülshager, U.R., Alberts, H.J., Feinholdt, A. and Lang, J.W. (2013) 'Benefits of mindfulness at work: The role of mindfulness in emotion regulation, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98(2), pp. 310-325.
9. Klimecki, O.M. and Singer, T. (2012) 'Empathic distress fatigue rather than compassion fatigue? Integrating findings from empathy research', *Emotion Review*, 4(4), pp. 371-372.
10. Kotsou, I., Mikolajczak, M., Heeren, A., Grégoire, S. and Leys, C. (2019) 'Improving emotional intelligence: A systematic review of existing interventions and their efficacy', *Emotion Review*, 11(2), pp. 164-178.
11. Kupperschmidt, B. R. (2000) 'Multigenerational employees: strategies for effective management', *The Health Care Manager*, 19(1), pp. 65–76.
12. Mahmoud, A. B., Fuxman, L. and Mohr, I. (2021) “‘We aren't all the same’: Anticipating Gen Z's workplace expectations”, *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 22(1).

13. Mayer, J.D. and Salovey, P. (1997) 'What is emotional intelligence?', in Salovey, P. and Sluyter, D.J. (eds.) *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Educational implications*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 3-34.
14. Twenge, J. M. (2010) 'A review of the empirical evidence on generational differences in work attitudes', *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), pp. 201–210.
15. Twenge, J. M. (2023) *Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America's Future*. New York: Atria Books.