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Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace: A Critical Evaluation

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1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is widely recognised as a critical determinant of workplace effectiveness, leadership quality, and organisational performance. Originating from the early work of Salovey and Mayer (1990), EI refers to the capacity to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions effectively in everyday interactions. The concept was subsequently popularised by Goleman (1995) who argued that EI may be more predictive of professional success than cognitive intelligence alone. As Goleman (1995, p.34) observed, being attuned to one's own emotions is a prerequisite for reading them accurately in others, a principle that underpins every component of emotionally intelligent leadership.

This report critically evaluates how employees can harness EI components to improve performance, wellbeing, and interpersonal relationships, drawing on the frameworks of Goleman (1995), Wiedmer (2015), Bar-On (2006), and related practices including Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Management by Walking Around (MBWA). It then examines the generational characteristics from Traditionalists to Generation Z that managers must understand when recruiting diverse, high-performing teams, before concluding with targeted recommendations for HR professionals and line managers.

2. Critical Evaluation of Emotional Intelligence Components in the Workplace

Emotional intelligence in the workplace is not a singular concept; rather, it is an umbrella term for a collection of interrelated competencies that govern how individuals recognise and manage their own emotions and navigate social interactions. Several well-established models illuminate these competencies, each offering a distinct but complementary lens through which to evaluate EI in practice.

2.1 Goleman's Five-Component Model

Goleman's (1995) seminal model identifies five core components of emotional intelligence: **Self-Awareness**, **Self-Management**, **Motivation**, **Empathy**, and **Social Skills**. These components form the most widely applied EI framework in organisational and management literature, providing managers with a practical blueprint for assessing and developing emotionally competent workforces (Goleman, 1995).

Self-Awareness: Is the ability to recognise one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values is the foundational EI component. In the workplace, self-aware

employees make more reflective decisions, communicate more authentically, and are less likely to allow unresolved emotional states to interfere with professional responsibilities (Goleman, 1998).

Self-Management: Refers to the regulation of disruptive impulses and moods.

Employees who exhibit this competency remain composed under stress, adapt to change more readily, and maintain a solutions-focused mindset (Goleman, 1998).

Leaders lacking self-management risk emotional 'dissonance' where expressed emotions are not suitable with felt emotions which erodes trust and undermines team cohesion over time.

Motivation: In Goleman's model refers to an intrinsic drive to achieve beyond external rewards. Highly motivated employees demonstrate persistence, initiative, and commitment to organisational goals. Goleman (1995) posits that this type of motivation, rooted in genuine interest rather than financial incentives, correlates strongly with superior performance and reduced turnover.

Empathy: Is the ability to understand and share the emotional states of others, particularly vital in diverse and customer-facing workplaces. Empathic employees build stronger relationships, reduce interpersonal conflict, and are more adept at recognising the unstated needs of colleagues and clients (Goleman, 1995).

Social Skills: Encompassing communication, conflict resolution, collaboration, and influence represent EI in its most visible, applied form. Employees with strong social skills are effective networkers, persuasive communicators, and skilled mediators (Goleman, 1998). In team environments, social skill facilitates the formation of psychological safety, whereby team members feel confident to voice ideas and concerns without fear of ridicule, a condition identified as foundational to high-performing teams (Brackett, Rivers and Salovey, 2011).

Critically, while Goleman's model has achieved significant popular resonance, it has attracted academic debate. Some scholars argue that Goleman expanded the definition of EI to include personality traits and motivational constructs that lie outside strict emotional processing, thereby limiting the model's discriminant validity. Nevertheless, its practical accessibility makes it a valuable diagnostic and developmental tool for workplace application (Brackett, Rivers and Salovey, 2011).

2.2 The Wiedmer Ability-Based Model

Wiedmer (2015) proposes an ability-based model that conceptualises EI through five distinct but interconnected capacities: Emotion Identification, Emotion Understanding, Emotion Expression, Emotion Regulation, and Emotion Use. Unlike Goleman's mixed

model, this approach treats EI as a specific set of cognitive abilities that can be objectively measured and developed (Mayer, Roberts and Barsade, 2008).

Emotion Identification: involves accurately perceiving emotions in oneself and others, including non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language. In recruitment settings, employees with strong identification abilities are more perceptive interviewers, better able to gauge candidate authenticity and cultural fit.

Emotion Understanding: Refers to comprehending the complex, evolving nature of emotions and their causes, helping employees anticipate how colleagues might respond to change and enabling more thoughtful communication during organisational transitions (Wiedmer, 2015).

Emotion Expression: Is the ability to articulate one's emotional state clearly and appropriately. Managers who express frustration constructively model healthy workplace culture, whereas those who suppress or dramatize emotions create confusion and anxiety (Wiedmer, 2015).

Emotion Regulation: Perhaps the most operationally significant component. This allows individuals to manage both positive and negative emotional states to facilitate goal achievement. Employees with strong regulation abilities are more resilient following setbacks and contribute to a calmer, more productive team climate.

Emotion Use: Refers to the capacity to harness emotions to support cognitive processes such as decision-making, creativity, and problem-solving. Positive affect tends to promote creative, expansive thinking, while mild negative affect facilitates detail-oriented, analytical processing (Mayer, Roberts and Barsade, 2008).

The Wiedmer model's strength lies in its measurability and developmental precision: because each ability can be assessed independently, organisations can target specific EI deficits through tailored coaching and training programmes. However, focusing purely on abilities risks neglecting the motivational and dispositional factors that influence whether individuals choose to deploy their EI capacities in a given situation (Brackett, Rivers and Salovey, 2011).

2.3 Comparative Analysis: Goleman and Wiedmer Models

While both Goleman (1995) and Wiedmer (2015) provide influential frameworks for understanding emotional intelligence, they differ substantially in their conceptual orientation, scope, and practical application. A direct comparison illuminates their complementary strengths and respective limitations, enabling organisations to select or combine both frameworks more strategically.

Nature of EI: Goleman's model is widely characterised as a "mixed model", blending cognitive emotional abilities with personality traits, motivational dispositions, and social competencies. This breadth enhances accessibility but critics argue it dilutes construct validity by incorporating characteristics more properly associated with personality (Mayer, Roberts and Barsade, 2008). Wiedmer's model adopts a strictly ability-based approach, treating EI as a discrete set of measurable cognitive skills, more scientifically precise, but narrower in scope.

Structure and Components: Both models identify five core dimensions of EI, yet these are substantively different. Goleman's components – **Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Motivation, Empathy,** and **Social Skills** are oriented around interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies visible in workplace behaviour. Wiedmer's capacities – **Emotion Identification, Emotion Understanding, Emotion Expression, Emotion Regulation, and Emotion Use** are framed as sequential cognitive processes. Notably, Goleman's Motivation has no direct equivalent in Wiedmer's model, whereas Wiedmer's Emotion Use deliberately leveraging emotions to enhance cognitive performance is not explicitly addressed by Goleman (Brackett, Rivers and Salovey, 2011).

Measurability and Assessment: Wiedmer's ability-based model is designed to be measured through performance-based tests evaluated against expert consensus, offering a degree of objectivity that mixed models cannot replicate. Goleman's competencies, while assessable through 360-degree feedback and self-report inventories, are more susceptible to social desirability bias (Mayer, Roberts and Barsade, 2008). For evidence-based talent management, Wiedmer's model provides more reliable diagnostic data, whereas Goleman's framework lends itself more naturally to developmental coaching contexts.

Workplace Application: Goleman's framework is particularly well-suited to leadership development, performance management, and culture-building, where its broad, behaviourally grounded competencies provide accessible targets at all management levels (Goleman, 1998). Wiedmer's model is better suited to targeted coaching, recruitment assessment, and team analysis, enabling more precise interventions. Together, the two frameworks are complementary: Goleman provides the organisational context in which EI is expressed, while Wiedmer clarifies the underlying cognitive mechanisms that make effective emotional functioning possible (Brackett, Rivers and Salovey, 2011).

In summary, while Goleman's model excels in accessibility and real-world applicability to leadership and management, Wiedmer's model offers greater scientific rigour and

diagnostic precision. The most effective organisational approach draws on both frameworks in tandem: Goleman's competency model to set developmental goals, and Wiedmer's ability-based framework to assess and monitor progress objectively.

2.4 Bar-On's EQ-i Model

Bar-On (2006) developed one of the earliest psychometric measures of EI called the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), which organises emotional and social intelligence into five broad domains: Intrapersonal Functioning, Interpersonal Functioning, Adaptability, Stress Management, and General Mood. This model is distinctive in its emphasis on the dynamic, malleable nature of EI, conceptualised not as a fixed trait but as a learnable set of competencies that develop across the lifespan (Bar-On, 2006). The adaptability subscale is particularly relevant in contemporary workplaces characterised by rapid technological change and organisational restructuring. Employees with high adaptability scores demonstrate flexible thinking, comfort with ambiguity, and an ability to update problem-solving strategies in response to new information (Bar-On, 2006). In digital transformation programmes, emotionally adaptive employees are significantly more likely to embrace new systems and support colleagues through transition resistance.

2.5 MBSR and MBWA as Complementary Practices

Beyond formal EI frameworks, two applied management practices merit consideration for their capacity to operationalise emotional intelligence at the organisational level: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Management by Walking Around (MBWA).

MBSR cultivates the self-awareness and emotional regulation competencies central to both Goleman's and Wiedmer's models. Organisations that have embedded mindfulness programmes into their management development curricula consistently report improvements in leadership effectiveness, interpersonal communication, and creative problem-solving (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Critically, mindfulness practice does not merely manage symptoms of workplace stress; it addresses the root cause by training practitioners to observe emotional reactions without being compelled to act on them impulsively, thereby strengthening self-management at its core.

MBWA involves managers proactively engaging with employees at their workstations rather than through formal channels alone. Its effectiveness is contingent on the empathy and social skills that define EI. A manager who walks the floor with genuine curiosity and active listening is practising applied emotional intelligence; one who does so

performatively generates cynicism and disengagement (Goleman, 1998). MBWA therefore provides a practical vehicle for modelling EI competencies daily and reinforcing an emotionally intelligent culture.

In summary, Goleman's, Wiedmer's, and Bar-On's models converge on the view that EI is a prerequisite for effective workplace functioning, and that it is positively associated with job performance, leadership effectiveness, and employee wellbeing (Brackett, Rivers and Salovey, 2011). Organisations that invest in EI development through training, coaching, MBSR, and practices such as MBWA are better positioned to build inclusive, resilient, and high-performing workforces.

3. Generational Characteristics and Emotional Intelligence in Recruitment

One of the most significant challenges facing managers today is leading and recruiting across a multigenerational workforce. Contemporary organisations may include up to five generations simultaneously: **Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z**. Each cohort has been shaped by different historical, economic, and technological forces, producing distinct values, communication styles, and emotional dispositions that managers must understand (Lyons and Kuron, 2014). Emotional intelligence provides the interpretive framework through which managers can bridge these differences and leverage the unique strengths of each cohort.

3.1 Traditionalists and Baby Boomers

Traditionalists (born before 1945) and Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) share many values rooted in post-war economic rebuilding and institutional loyalty. Traditionalists are characterised by stability, a strong work ethic, respect for hierarchy, and deference to organisational authority (Wiedmer, 2015). Although few Traditionalists remain in active employment, their influence persists through the institutional norms and organisational cultures they helped to shape.

Baby Boomers represent the most experienced segment of the contemporary workforce, bringing a wealth of institutional knowledge, sector expertise, and client relationship capital. They tend to be career-minded, status-conscious, and competitive, typically valuing face-to-face communication, structured appraisal processes, and recognition through promotion or title (Wiedmer, 2015). In recruitment terms, managers should recognise that Baby Boomers may approach interviews with a strong expectation of

transactional respect; deploying empathy and social skill to signal genuine recognition of their experience is essential to engaging this cohort authentically.

3.2 Generation X

Generation X (born 1965–1980) grew up in an era of economic uncertainty and institutional scepticism, producing a generation characterised by independence, resilience, and pragmatism. They strongly value work-life balance, autonomy, and flexible working arrangements, and are typically sceptical of corporate rhetoric, preferring concrete feedback and transparent communication (Wiedmer, 2015).

In recruitment contexts, managers should clearly articulate role autonomy, flexible scheduling, and progression pathways. From an EI perspective, strong empathic listening and avoidance of hierarchical communication styles are essential when engaging Gen X applicants, whose pragmatism makes them sensitive to inauthenticity (Lyons and Kuron, 2014). Goleman (1998) notes that this cohort responds best to managers who demonstrate competence and genuine respect rather than positional authority, making self-awareness and social skill especially critical EI competencies.

3.3 Millennials (Generation Y)

Millennials (born 1981–1996) are the largest generational cohort in the current workforce. Characterised by technological fluency and a preference for purpose-driven, collaborative work, they prioritise meaningful contribution, diversity, and continuous learning over salary alone (Twenge, 2017). In recruitment, they respond positively to organisations with a clearly articulated social purpose and robust digital communication channels, but require frequent feedback to sustain engagement. The emotionally intelligent recruiter must balance authentic enthusiasm for organisational mission with realistic job previews, as expectation mismatches significantly increase the likelihood of early disengagement. Managers who foster Bar-On's interpersonal competencies are best equipped to build the psychological safety Millennial employees require for peak performance (Bar-On, 2006).

3.4 Generation Z

Generation Z (born 1997–2012) are the newest entrants to the workforce and represent a distinct departure from even their Millennial predecessors. Having grown up entirely in the digital age, Gen Z are true digital natives: pragmatic, entrepreneurial, financially cautious, and deeply concerned with job security and practical outcomes (Dimock, 2019). They are also statistically more prone to anxiety, depression, and mental health

challenges than previous generations, a pattern linked to social media saturation and heightened global uncertainty (Twenge, 2017).

In recruitment, Gen Z candidates prioritise clear compensation structures, psychological safety, mental health support, and authentic employer branding over aspirational corporate narratives. They are highly alert to performative diversity and wellbeing initiatives, demanding evidence of genuine organisational commitment rather than superficial policy statements (Dimock, 2019).

The EI competency most critical to managing Generation Z is empathy specifically, the willingness to acknowledge and respond to their emotional and psychological needs without stigma. Managers who leverage MBSR principles to model healthy stress management, and who use MBWA to maintain visible, accessible, and non-judgemental communication, are significantly better positioned to engage this generation effectively (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Across all cohorts, the consistent finding is that emotionally intelligent managers who adapt their communication style, recognise the emotional priorities of different groups, and create psychologically safe environments achieve significantly better recruitment and retention outcomes than those relying on standardised approaches (Lyons and Kuron, 2014).

4. Conclusion

This report has demonstrated that emotional intelligence is a multifaceted and indispensable competency in modern workplaces. Drawing on the models of Goleman (1995), Wiedmer (2015), and Bar-On (2006), alongside complementary practices of MBSR and MBWA, it is evident that EI significantly enhances individual performance, team cohesion, leadership effectiveness, and organisational resilience. Furthermore, in an era of accelerating generational diversity, the ability to understand and respond to the distinct emotional profiles and workplace expectations of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z is no longer optional, it is a strategic imperative. Organisations that cultivate emotionally intelligent leadership cultures, characterised by self-awareness, empathy, adaptability, and authentic communication, are best positioned to attract, develop, and retain the talent necessary for sustained competitive advantage.

5. Recommendations

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are proposed for the Senior Management Team (SMT):

1. **Invest in EI Development Programmes:** Embed structured EI training, drawing on Goleman's five competencies and the Wiedmer ability model into management development curricula at all levels, using validated tools such as Bar-On's EQ-I to measure progress and target specific developmental gaps.
2. **Integrate MBSR into Employee Wellbeing Strategy:** Introduce organisational MBSR programmes [6] as a proactive wellbeing intervention targeting emotional regulation and stress resilience, particularly for Gen Z and Millennial employees with higher reported anxiety levels.
3. **Train Managers in Generationally Aware Recruitment:** Provide targeted recruitment training that builds awareness of generational EI profiles, enabling interviewers to adapt their communication style and assessment criteria to connect authentically with candidates from all cohorts.
4. **Champion MBWA as a Cultural Practice:** Encourage line managers to adopt MBWA as a structured, coached practice [5], supported by training in active listening and empathic communication, to model EI in daily interactions and build trust across the multigenerational workforce.

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