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Role of Emotional Intelligence in Employee Performance

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Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become a central focus in contemporary organisational research, as emotional and social competencies are increasingly recognised as critical for effective workplace performance. Modern organisations operate in environments characterised by rapid change, growing workforce diversity, and complex interpersonal demands. Consequently, employees are required not only to meet technical expectations but also to manage emotional pressures, communicate across different relational contexts, and collaborate effectively. EI can be described as the ability to identify, understand, and manage emotional responses in oneself and other people, supports individuals in navigating these challenges, and responding constructively to interpersonal interactions (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

This report examines the role of EI within organisational settings and critically evaluates how employees apply EI-related competencies in everyday work. Using Goleman's (1995) five-component model: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, the analysis explores how emotional capabilities shape teamwork, conflict resolution, adaptability, and overall organisational functioning. The report also considers how EI manifests differently across Generations X, Y, and Z, highlighting key implications for recruitment and managerial decision-making. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that EI is fundamental to individual and organisational effectiveness and underscores the value of embedding EI principles within leadership, development, and recruitment practices.

2 Critical Evaluation of How Employees Use Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

Based on Goleman's Model

Working within increasingly dynamic and diverse organisational environments, emotional intelligence (EI) has become an essential framework for understanding why some employees excel in interpersonal situations while others struggle. Technical skills account for only a portion of an employee performance. The ability to manage emotions, sense what others are feeling or implying, and build productive working relationships has become equally important. Goleman's model of emotional intelligence, which incorporates abilities such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, remains a

leading framework for understanding workplace behavior. When combined with contemporary EI theories such as the Ability Model (Mayer, Caruso and Salovey, 2016) and empirical research (Newman and Joseph, 2022; Miao, Humphrey and Qian, 2017), Goleman's framework provides a powerful tool for critically analysing how employees use emotional competencies in real organisational contexts.

From a management perspective, understanding these competencies is critical for supporting staff development, improving collaboration, and enhancing organisational culture. Emotional intelligence has been consistently linked to improved teamwork, conflict management, and organisational effectiveness (Côté, 2014).

The following sections critically evaluate how employees apply each EI component in practice and highlight the benefits and limitations of each competency.

2.1 Self-Awareness: Recognising Emotions and Their Professional Impact

Self-awareness is the cornerstone of Goleman's EI framework. It involves an employee's ability to recognise their emotions, understand how these emotions influence behaviour and accurately detect their strengths and limitations. Employees who demonstrate high self-awareness are better able to navigate feedback, regulate their reactions and maintain perspective during challenging situations.

In practice, self-aware employees acknowledge when they feel stressed, defensive, or overwhelmed, enabling them to adjust their behaviour before issues escalate. From the perspective of organisational leadership, these individuals tend to be easier to coach because they understand how their emotions influence performance. For example, an employee who knows they become anxious during presentations may request additional preparation or speak openly about the support they need.

Research strongly supports the importance of self-awareness. Newman and Joseph (2022) detect that the ability to recognise emotional cues improves judgement and reduces impulsive decision-making. Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) propose that accurately recognising emotions is the key skill that enables individuals to engage in more sophisticated emotional reasoning and behavioural responses.

However, self-awareness is not consistently developed across all employees. Miao, Humphrey and Qian (2017) demonstrate that many individuals overestimate their emotional

competence. This gap between self-perception and actual behaviour can lead to misunderstandings, poor communication, and resistance to feedback. Many employees assume their communication is effective, yet they frequently create or escalate team conflict.

This illustrates a limitation of self-awareness: the skill is often assumed instead of being checked. Employees may claim to be emotionally aware, but without reflective practice, coaching and honest feedback, their understanding of themselves may remain superficial.

Despite its limitations, self-awareness remains the basis for all other EI dimensions. Without recognising one's emotional tendencies, employees struggle to regulate emotions, understand others, or build meaningful professional relationships. Managers must actively support the development of self-awareness through structured feedback, reflective tools, and regular performance conversations.

2.2 Self-Regulation: Managing Emotions Under Pressure

Self-regulation, the second element of Goleman's model, refers to the ability to manage impulses and control disruptive emotions. In workplaces marked by rapid change, competing demands and interpersonal tension, this competency is essential (Antonopoulou, Javed & Fotiadis, 2024).

Employees who demonstrate strong self-regulation can manage stress without becoming overwhelmed. They keep their emotions in check, think before reacting and maintain professionalism even during conflict. These behaviours are highly valued from a managerial standpoint because they promote stability and prevent emotional contagion within teams.

For example, during peak workload periods, employees with high self-regulation do not panic or react defensively. They prioritise tasks and support colleagues. Their behaviour helps maintain calm and reduces anxiety across the team.

Research evidence consistently highlights the critical role of competency. Miao, Humphrey and Qian (2017) show that emotional regulation is strongly associated with job performance and organisational commitment. Employees who manage emotions effectively tend to resolve conflict more constructively.

However, self-regulation can also become problematic when misunderstood or misapplied. Hochschild's emotional labour theory highlights the risks of constant emotional suppression, particularly in service-oriented roles (Hochschild, 2015). Employees who must consistently hide frustration, disappointment or stress may experience emotional exhaustion or reduced

authenticity. Workers can seem calm externally, yet still face emotional fatigue beneath the surface.

Another issue is that too much self-regulation may suppress creativity and discourage open communication. Employees who over-control emotions may become overly cautious or reluctant to share concerns, reducing psychological safety.

While self-regulation is a vital workplace skill, managers must strike a balance. Employees need strategies for expressing emotions constructively—not simply suppressing them.

2.3 Motivation: Emotional Drive, Persistence and Organisational Commitment

The third component of Goleman's model, motivation, concerns an individual's capacity to channel emotional energy into goal achievement with enthusiasm, persistence, and optimism. Emotionally motivated employees align closely with organisational values, uphold high performance standards, and detect obstacles as opportunities rather than threats. From a managerial perspective, such employees have a positive impact on team morale; they demonstrate initiative, take ownership of tasks, and actively seek development opportunities. Their proactive approach to identifying issues and proposing solutions also reduces managerial oversight. Clark and Poles Ello (2017) note that emotionally intelligent individuals exhibit stronger motivation because they more effectively recognise how their personal goals correspond with organisational expectations. Similarly, Miao, Humphrey and Qian (2017) identify a clear association between EI and favourable job attitudes, including engagement, commitment and satisfaction.

However, motivation is shaped not only by EI but also by organisational conditions. Even highly emotionally intelligent employees may disengage when confronted with unfair treatment, insufficient recognition, ambiguous role expectations or excessive workload demands. Motivation should be viewed as a dynamic two-way process. EI supports determination and resilience, but organisational systems must reinforce these behaviours. Managers must provide constructive feedback, meaningful development opportunities and appropriate autonomy to create an environment in which motivation can be sustained.

2.4 Empathy: Understanding Others and Strengthening Social Relationships

Empathy involves understanding the emotions and experiences of other people. This is the fourth component of Goleman's EI model. In diverse and interconnected workplaces, empathy is essential for building collaboration, trust, and cooperation. Empathetic employees recognise when colleagues are struggling, adapt their communication to emotional cues and respond

sensitively to different viewpoints. Such behaviours minimise conflict, strengthen team relationships and foster a supportive work climate.

Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) emphasise that accurately interpreting others' emotions is fundamental to effective interpersonal reasoning, while Newman and Joseph (2022) identify empathy as a strong predictor of teamwork and interpersonal performance. From a managerial perspective, empathy is particularly valuable in roles centred on customer service, leadership, mentoring and conflict management, as empathetic employees contribute positively to organisational culture by promoting respect, cooperation, and emotional support.

Despite these benefits, empathy can become counterproductive when excessive. Over-identifying with others' emotional experiences may lead to compassion fatigue, emotional overload or weakened professional boundaries. In practice, I have observed highly empathetic employees who overextend themselves emotionally, ultimately compromising their own well-being. Empathy must be balanced with robust self-regulation to prevent emotional exhaustion and sustain healthy professional boundaries.

2.5 Social Skills: Communication, Influence and Conflict Management

Goleman's final EI component, social skills, includes communication, persuasion, collaboration, and conflict resolution. These outward-facing behaviours are often the most visible indicators of emotional intelligence in organisational settings. Employees with strong social skills form productive relationships, communicate effectively, and adapt their interpersonal style to different audiences. From a managerial standpoint, such employees frequently act as informal leaders and contribute to team morale and conflict resolution. Clark and Polesello (2017) emphasise that EI-driven social competencies underpin leadership potential, and research also shows that leader EI positively influences team attitudes and performance (Wong and Law, 2002).

Nonetheless, social skills require careful interpretation. Miao, Humphrey and Qian (2017) caution that emotional insight can be used manipulatively, as individuals may employ emotional awareness manipulatively for self-interest rather than shared outcomes. This highlights the need to assess the sincerity, intent, and ethical integrity of social conduct.

Goleman's EI framework offers a comprehensive lens for examining how employees navigate emotional and interpersonal demands. Each competency, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, plays a distinct role in shaping organisational behaviour. However, these abilities also present limitations. Employees may display uneven development across EI domains, and emotional competencies can be affected by organisational culture, workload, and individual traits. Self-awareness may be overestimated, self-regulation may

encourage emotional suppression, motivation may decline without structural reinforcement, empathy may result in emotional fatigue, and social skills may be used for self-serving purposes.

Despite these constraints, EI remains a valuable framework for understanding and enhancing employee behaviour. Managers should integrate EI insights with ethical leadership, supportive organisational practices, and continuous development opportunities to ensure that emotional intelligence reinforces, rather than undermines, organisational effectiveness.

3 Emotional Intelligence and Considerations for Recruiting Across Generations

Workforces today are increasingly multigenerational, requiring managers to recognise how emotional intelligence (EI) manifests differently across age groups. These variations influence communication preferences, motivation, adaptability, and expectations of leadership factors that are central to recruitment decisions. Understanding generational characteristics enables managers to determine which EI competencies are most relevant when hiring employees from Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z. Although generational assumptions should be applied cautiously, research indicates that employees from different age cohorts often share distinct values and emotional expectations shaped by their social, cultural, and technological contexts (Newman and Joseph, 2022). This chapter examines the key characteristics of each generation and outlines EI-related considerations that managers should integrate into recruitment practices.

3.1 Generation X (born 1965–1980)

Generation X entered the workforce during a period of economic restructuring, early digital transformation and rising dual-income households. These conditions shaped traits commonly associated with this category, including independence, adaptability, resilience, and self-reliance. Gen X employees typically value autonomy, direct communication, and a balanced approach to work and personal life. Compared with younger generations raised on digital media, they often prefer face-to-face interaction, practical problem-solving and clear expectations. Their professional identity reflects the shift from traditional hierarchical structures toward more flexible organisational models.

From a managerial perspective, recruiting Generation X employees involves recognising their strong capacity for self-regulation and their ability to remain composed during organisational change. Their extensive work and life experience contributes to a stable emotional presence, making them well-suited to leadership or mentoring roles. When evaluating Gen X candidates, managers should consider their emotional consistency, stress tolerance developed through adapting to technological and economic transitions, and their self-awareness in maintaining professional boundaries. Their motivation is often grounded in competence, reliability, and long-term commitment, while their empathy and social skills shaped by direct interpersonal experience, support effective conflict resolution and collaborative leadership.

Research suggests that older generations tend to exhibit greater emotional stability, enabling them to navigate complex workplace environments with composure (Miao, Humphrey and Qian, 2017). Accordingly, EI assessments for Generation X applicants should emphasise emotional steadiness, clarity of communication and the capacity to mentor younger colleagues.

3.2 Generation Y / Millennials (born 1981–1996)

Key Characteristics

Millennials form a significant part of today's workforce and are characterised by adaptability, digital fluency, and a preference for meaningful work. Having grown up during rapid technological advancement and globalisation, they value collaboration, regular feedback and roles that align with personal values. They also tend to favour supportive leadership styles and seek continuous learning and development. Millennials are commonly described as socially conscious, team-oriented, and open to diversity qualities that shape how they express and interpret emotions in professional settings.

From a recruitment perspective, managers should recognise Millennials' strengths in empathy, collaboration, and communication, particularly for team-based roles. This generation typically responds well to emotionally aware leadership and transparent organisational cultures. Their interpersonal awareness supports inclusivity, and their motivation is often driven by purposeful work rather than financial incentives. Strong social skills facilitate cross-team collaboration, while their adaptability and emotional openness make them receptive to feedback and coaching. Research indicates that Millennials are more comfortable discussing emotions at work and expect leaders to demonstrate emotional intelligence (Clark and Polesello, 2017). Accordingly, recruitment methods such as scenario-based EI questions, values-focused interviews and teamwork simulations align well with Millennial expectations.

However, Millennials may encounter difficulties with self-regulation in high-pressure contexts, partly due to developing professionally in fast-paced, feedback-rich environments. Managers should assess their emotional resilience and ability to handle constructive criticism without disengagement.

3.3 Generation Z (born 1997–2012)

Key Characteristics

Generation Z, the latest generation to join the labour market, has grown up engaged in digital technology, particularly smartphones and social media platforms, and immediate access to information. Consequently, they demonstrate strong technological proficiency, multitasking ability, and rapid learning. Gen Z employees typically value flexibility, mental health awareness, work–life balance and authenticity. They also expect diverse, inclusive, and psychologically safe environments, placing greater emphasis on transparent communication and emotional understanding than previous generations (Schroth, 2019).

Recruiting Generation Z requires recognising their distinct emotional and behavioural tendencies. Many Gen Z workers show high emotional awareness, particularly in relation to well-being and balance, and possess strong motivation for learning due to their technological fluency. They are generally comfortable with open emotional expression, including conversations about stress and personal challenges, and they expect empathetic and authentic leadership that supports positive manager–employee relationships. However, their extensive use of digital communication can result in varied levels of face-to-face interpersonal skills. Managers should therefore assess social competencies through a combination of digital and in-person interaction tasks.

Research indicates that younger employees place significant importance on psychological safety and inclusivity, expecting leaders to display empathy and emotional responsiveness (Schutte and Malouff, 2019). Recruitment processes for Gen Z should evaluate EI-related behaviours such as adaptability, collaboration and emotional communication using methods like role-play, teamwork exercises or virtual simulations. Generation Z may require additional support with self-regulation, particularly when navigating uncertainty or responding to constructive criticism. Their strong emotional awareness can also heighten stress when organisational expectations are unclear or when transparency is lacking.

3.4 Cross-Generational EI Implications for Recruitment

When recruiting across Generations X, Y and Z, managers must recognise that emotional intelligence (EI) manifests differently across age groups due to variations in upbringing, technological exposure, and workplace experiences (Newman and Joseph, 2022). These differences shape communication preferences, motivational drivers, and emotional competencies. Generation X generally favours direct and clear communication, is motivated by stability, autonomy, and recognition of expertise, and often demonstrates strong self-regulation, resilience, and practicality. Millennials typically prefer collaborative and feedback-rich communication, are motivated by meaningful work, development opportunities and a positive team culture, and exhibit strengths in empathy, collaboration, and openness. Generation Z, by contrast, expects transparent and authentic communication, prioritises mental well-being, flexibility, and inclusivity, and shows heightened emotional awareness, comfort with expression and strong adaptability. Research also shows that generational groups differ systematically in work attitudes and emotional expectations (Twenge, 2010).

Effective recruitment requires assessment methods that align with generational expectations and accurately capture EI-related behaviours. Structured behavioural interviews, scenario-based EI tasks, psychometric tools and teamwork simulations enable managers to evaluate candidates fairly across age groups and identify the emotional competencies most relevant to organisational needs.

Recommendation

To strengthen emotional intelligence across the organisation, managers should implement targeted development initiatives aligned with Goleman's (1995) five-component EI model. EI training programmes ought to prioritise the enhancement of self-awareness and self-regulation through reflective practice, constructive feedback and mindfulness-based techniques that enable employees to manage emotional triggers more effectively. Empathy and social skills can be further developed by fostering collaborative problem-solving, structured mentoring relationships and open communication practices that support trust and team cohesion.

Integrating EI-focused behavioural assessments into recruitment processes will help identify candidates who demonstrate strong interpersonal competencies, adaptability, and alignment with organisational values. In addition, managers should adopt relational leadership practices such as regular one-to-one conversations, active listening, and consistent engagement with

staff to model emotionally intelligent behaviour and promote psychologically safe working environments.

Collectively, these strategies will strengthen organisational capacity for resilience, collaboration, and emotional competence, thereby contributing to a more positive, supportive, and effective workplace culture.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence has become a critical component of effective organisational performance, shaping how employees communicate, collaborate, and respond to workplace demands. As demonstrated throughout this report, EI helps people understand their emotional responses and manage them effectively, adapt to changing circumstances and engage productively with colleagues. Drawing on Goleman's (1995) five-component model: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, the analysis has illustrated how EI competencies enhance teamwork, support conflict resolution, and strengthen organisational adaptability.

The findings also emphasise the relevance of EI within managerial practice, particularly in the recruitment and support of employees from different generational groups. Although EI is not a comprehensive solution to all organisational challenges, it provides a valuable framework for interpreting behaviour and fostering constructive workplace relationships. By embedding EI into recruitment processes, development initiatives and leadership approaches, organisations can cultivate a more emotionally capable workforce and establish a resilient, positive culture that promotes both long-term effectiveness and employee well-being.

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