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Developing Emotional Intelligence skills

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Introduction

In response to a recent organisational climate survey, senior leadership identified specific areas of team leadership that were directly correlated to the incorporation of mindfulness and emotional intelligence (EI) in teams that showed significant improvements in team morale, communication and conflict. This report is a response to a request from the Head of Department to provide a formal analysis report to the Senior Management Team (SMT) in anticipation of the strategic planning meeting in September 2026. The goal of the report is to provide information to guide leadership decisions concerning employee development, leadership ability, and future recruitment plans, focusing specifically on how emotional intelligence can help improve employee performance, promote inclusive leadership and contribute to a psychologically safe workplace.

Task 1: Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

This section will critically appraise the ways in which employees can use the pillars of emotional intelligence in the workplace to enhance their performance, working relationships and wellbeing. Three influential and complementary models of EI, namely Goleman's Emotional Intelligence model, Mayer and Salovey's Abilities model and Bar-On's Emotional-social Intelligence model have been used to ground the discussion. While each model provides a different perspective on the nature of emotional intelligence and its role, when taken as a whole, they provide a rich overview of the impact of emotionally intelligent behaviour on communication, conflict management, leadership and decision making in today's organisations. The analysis also includes a review of recent peer-reviewed research to provide evidence that these decades-old theoretical approaches are very well supported by research and are thus very relevant to the current practice in the workplace.

Understanding Emotional Intelligence: Three Key Models

In general, emotional intelligence is defined as the capacity to perceive, comprehend and manage one's own emotions, and to recognise and respond to the emotions of others (Goleman, 1995). Goleman's model states that there are five interdependent parts: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-awareness is the capacity to identify one's own emotions and how they are impacting on one's thinking, judgment and behavior. Self-regulation develops into this, as it refers to the ability to control or redirect unwanted emotions and impulses; that is, to not act on them automatically. According to Goleman's model, motivation is an inner drive towards a goal, which is energizing and persistent and usually does not require external reinforcement like money or status. Empathy is the perception and understanding of the emotional experiences of others, and

social skills are the management of interpersonal relationships to achieve the common goals. Later, Goleman suggested that EI may be a better indicator of a person's success in leadership, especially in human resource-related fields (Goleman, 1998).

Mayer and Salovey (1997) take a more scientific, ability-based approach. They do not consider EI as a general collection of characteristics, but rather as four distinguishable branches: the ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others, to use emotions to facilitate thinking, to understand the causes and consequences of emotions, and to manage emotions in oneself and others. The model has gained popularity in academic and psychological studies because it considers EI as a cognitive ability, which can be objectively tested and measured and not only supposed based on personality or self-report.

Bar-On (2006) offers a third, complementary perspective, focusing specifically on how emotional and social competencies help individuals cope with the demands and pressures of their environment. His model encompasses five areas: intrapersonal skills (self-understanding and self-expression); interpersonal skills (understanding and relating well with others); adaptability (adjusting emotions and behaviour to changes); stress management (coping effectively with stress); and general mood (maintaining a positive mood). Bar-On's model is particularly helpful when applied in the workplace because it directly relates emotional competence with the ability of an individual to cope with pressure, deadlines and change which are common in today's workplace.

Overall, these three models illustrate that emotional intelligence is a multilevel construct consisting of self-understanding, self-management, empathy, and social skill. This has an important practical implication: EI is a combination of many learnable factors, and is not a single, innate ability that an employee has or does not have forever.

These basic theoretical models have been recently confirmed by research. In a large-scale psychometric meta-analysis published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, Dođru (2022) reviewed decades of research conducted in the workplace and revealed that there were consistent and statistically significant positive relationships between EI and important employee outcomes such as job performance, organisational commitment, job satisfaction and reduced job stress. This evidence is especially important because it is based on a great number of individual studies taking place in a variety of industries and countries, which indicates that EI and positive workplace outcomes is not a unique fit for a specific industry or context. In a similar fashion, Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023) in a hybrid literature review of 104 peer-reviewed articles and reviews published in *Heliyon*, found that EI is one of the most consistently studied and empirically supported variables in the literature regarding effective leadership and team functioning in a wide variety of organisational contexts, from healthcare to education to corporate management.

Communication, Conflict Management, and Decision-Making

Communication is much more about how well you read the other person's tone, body language, and emotions and how well you adjust your communication style accordingly. Employees with high EI tend to be more adept at doing so because they are aware of their own emotions and feelings and can pick up on the emotions and feelings of others, and respond appropriately, instead of dismissively (Goleman, 1998). For instance, a manager who has good empathy may sense that a member of the team is becoming frustrated or withdrawn during a meeting, and decide not to push him to contribute in the meeting but to check in with him afterwards. This type of communication helps to avoid misunderstandings, escalation of minor issues and contributes to the trust that is essential to good working relationships.

Conflict is a part of every work place, especially when employees have divergent priorities, working styles, or communication preferences. But EI is at the heart of dealing with conflict. One of the five components of Goleman's (1995) core components is self-regulation, which means that an employee will stop and think before reacting defensively or aggressively to a tense or heated situation. This is supported by Bar-On's (2006) stress management and adaptability components, which indicate that employees who are managing their own level of stress are much better able to defuse stress with others, rather than build it up. Recent empirical evidence points to the strong theoretical association. A study by Zhou et al. (2025) in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology* included 363 school principals and revealed that school principals with higher EI were more likely to use a collaborative, mediation style of conflict resolution, as opposed to avoiding or using forceful conflict resolution. They found that as EI grows, a leader's ability to choose a conflict resolution strategy that is more likely to maintain the relationship is also growing, while also attempting to solve the problem. This is further elaborated upon by Alharbi and Alnoor (2024) who in the PSU Research Review, showed a positive relationship between EI, constructive conflict-handling styles and the quality of strategic organisational decisions. This is significant as it demonstrates that the advantages of EI in conflict scenarios go beyond effective interpersonal relationships and include quantifiable improvements in organisational decision-making.

This is in close relation with the role of EI in decision making in general. According to Mayer and Salovey's (1997) "using emotions to facilitate thinking", emotions, if understood and interpreted properly, can serve as a valuable source of information for decision making instead of merely distracting from rational thinking. For example, a feeling of discomfort with a supplier's reliability or a friend's idea might be an important emotional clue that deserves further exploration, rather than just "rational" analysis and dismissal. Those who have high EI are likely to be more successful in distinguishing between authentic emotions and reactive ones, and therefore make more balanced,

thoughtful decisions, especially when time is of the essence, like in negotiations, crisis management, and time-sensitive operational decisions.

Leadership and Well-Being

The importance of inspiring, guiding and supporting others instead of giving orders has grown in the modern organisation and is seen as a key part of leadership. Goleman (1998) said that the best leaders are not necessarily the one who are best in their technical skills, but the one who is more emotionally intelligent in building trust and creating an environment where employees are not afraid to share suggestions or concerns. This concept of psychological safety is becoming a more critical area in today's organisational leadership and is associated with innovation, open communication and engagement.

More recent studies have confirmed the link between EI and well-being in the workplace in particular. In a cross-sectional study of healthcare workers published in *Frontiers in Public Health*, Cao et al. (2022) reported that the more EI a healthcare worker had, the less job burnout they experienced, even in emotionally taxing and stressful positions. This finding is significant because it shows that EI is not just a leadership asset that only managers can use, but also a psychological protective factor that can help the psychological health and resilience of employees, not just managers, in any organisation.

In this context, mindfulness is able to complement emotional intelligence very well. In the journal *Organizational Psychology Review*, Choi, Gruman and Leonard (2022) examined a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the positive relationship between mindfulness and employee performance, physical and psychological health, and well-being in organisations.

Significantly, in their review they also warn against the use of mindfulness interventions as a panacea or one-size-fits-all solution, but instead it is important for them to be tailored to the team, culture and context. This is a key point for the SMT to keep in mind it is not a given that any mindfulness training Programme and it will have a positive impact mindfulness. EI training should be customized to the pressures and dynamics of Organizations teams and departments. Collectively, these studies suggest that the combination of EI and mindfulness training provides a more comprehensive tool kit for managers, EI enables them to accurately perceive and skillfully manage emotions within their teams, and mindfulness helps them stay calm, focused, and non-reactive in the face of high operation demands.

From a practical perspective as Goleman would prefer to a more scientific, ability-based perspective, as Mayer and Salovey would prefer, to a stress and adaptability perspective, as Bar-On prefers, the evidence from peer-reviewed studies clearly and consistently shows that emotional intelligence has a direct and positive impact on communication, conflict management, leadership, sound decision-

making and employee health and well-being in a broad range of organisational contexts and industries.

Task 2: Managing a Multigenerational Workforce

Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z

Born between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, Gen Xers have been shaped by an era of economic restructuring, a preference that led to a desire for independence, a work-life balance and direct communication. Born between the early 1980s and the mid-90s (known as the Millennial Generation or Generation Y), they grew up during the same period as the internet and the financial crisis of 2008, and prefer working in a team-based environment and for a purpose. Generation Z - born from the mid-90's forward is the first generation to have always known smart phones and social media.

In a study published in the International Journal of Manpower, Mahmoud et al. (2021) directly compared the workplace motivation of Generation X, Y and Z employees and discovered that there are indeed differences in what motivates each generation, with Generation X employees more motivated by stability and autonomy, and Gen Z employees more motivated by purpose, growth opportunities and flexibility. In a scoping review published in the SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, Zahra, Handoyo and Fajrianthi (2025) also identified psychological safety, clear leadership, frequent feedback, and mental health support as key factors that resonate with Gen Z workers, and their comfort with rapidly evolving digital technologies as true digital natives.

Impact on Organisational Effectiveness

Such differences pose opportunities and risks. A variety of generations can help reinforce problem solving, with experience and new technologically savvy thinking. But one key and recent fact indicates problematic In a significant meta-analysis and qualitative review, published in the Journal of Organizational Behavior, Ravid, Costanza and Romero (2025) looked at decades of generational research and concluded that there were few systematic, meaningful differences between generations on most workplace outcomes. They found that many "generational" trends are better understood as life stage, personality and workplace phenomenon than as birth year phenomenon.

An important caveat about this report: Useful as generational trends are for providing evidence-based starting points, managers should be wary of relying on broad generational stereotypes for employees because it can lead to friction and disengagement.

The Role of Emotional Intelligence and Mindfulness

That's where EI and mindfulness are key management tools. Self-awareness allows managers to be aware of their own generational biases and not make the assumption that their own preferences are the “right” ones for working (Goleman, 1995). Empathy helps managers to see why a younger worker wants flexibility, or why an older worker prefers formal communication, without rendering either as a bad thing, and without relying on the generational assumption, given the mixed evidence highlighted by Ravid, Costanza and Romero (2025). Bar-On's (2006) interpersonal and adaptability components are helpful in building generational trust because they allow for flexibility in the way leaders lead, based on the individual rather than the cohort label.

Mindfulness goes along with this and helps to decrease automatic stereotyped reactions. Mindful employees are more aware of situational and interpersonal cues, and this enables managers to discover a worker's true needs at the moment, rather than making general assumptions about a whole generation of workers, says Choi, Gruman and Leonard (2022).

Practical Recommendations

Organisations can do this by creating flexible communication channels to cater to formal and informal communication preferences, giving individualised feedback frequency, offering tiered technology training for all generations to engage with confidence, and continuously training managers in EI and Mindfulness. What is important is that this training should also alert managers to avoid assuming generational trends are set in stone, and to test their hypotheses against the person in their presence, as per Ravid, Costanza and Romero's (2025) research.

Conclusion

A consistent picture emerges across both of the areas of this report. Based upon recent meta-analytical and empirical research, emotional intelligence, as defined in Goleman's pragmatic model, Mayer and Salovey's ability-based model, or Bar-On's stress and adaptability perspective, has a direct impact on communication, conflict management, leadership, decision-making and employee well-being. Meanwhile, today's workforce is more generationally diverse than ever, with Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z exhibiting true differences in workplace motivation and expectations.

Despite recent large-scale evidence suggesting these patterns are less entrenched and pronounced than popular stereotypes lead us to believe, and that they should not be applied in a blanket fashion to individuals. Combined with mindfulness, emotional intelligence gives managers the skills, self-awareness, empathy, flexibility, and present-moment awareness to manage intergenerational issues fairly and flexibly, based on the person and not the label. This means that EI and mindfulness training can be a leadership development Programme and a direct contributor to inclusive culture and organisational success, rather than just a well-being Programme, for SMT's strategic planning.

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