

# What is Emotional Intelligence And What's Missing?



I have a love/hate relationship of sorts with Emotional Intelligence. In 1995, my boss at the time suggested I read the recently released book by Daniel Goleman as part of my development. She didn't mean it in a casual "this is a book you might enjoy" kind of way, but more of a "if you don't figure this out, you'll never be successful" kind of way. Hmmm.

One of the reasons I purchased Learning in Action a few years ago was because there seemed to be no end to the depth of the space we call Emotional Intelligence. It's a rich, complex topic with so many angles into it.

This post is a bit on the dry side. It's intended to help you and your clients better understand the origin of Emotional Intelligence, how it has been defined, the limitations of some of those definitions and how the definition we use really matters if what we are wanting is to be more successful in life and in business.

## **A Brief History of Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined differently by different people. In fact, authors Gerald Matthews, Moshe Zeidner and Richard D. Roberts wrote in their 2004 book on the topic, "EI may be the most [protean](#) of all known psychological constructs." David Caruso, Research Affiliate at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, called EI a [conceptual inkblot](#).

Controversy over the definition, construction and measurement of EI is embedded in its history.

While some of the ideas and concepts underpinning EI have been around since as early as 1920, the term *emotional intelligence* is more recent.

- 1964 - Michael Beldoch used the term *emotional intelligence* in a research paper
- 1966 - B. Leuner wrote a paper entitled *Emotional Intelligence and Emancipation*
- 1983 - Developmental psychologist, Howard Gardner, published *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* which included both *interpersonal intelligence* and *intrapersonal intelligence* .
- 1985 - Wayne Payne wrote a doctoral thesis, *A Study of Emotion: Developing Emotional Intelligence*
- 1989 - Child psychologist, Stanley Greenspan, put forward a model to describe EI
- 1990 - Social psychologists, Peter Salovey and John Mayer, published their article, *Emotional Intelligence*
- 1995 - Science journalist, Daniel Goleman, published the book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*

In 1995, after more than 30 years of research and publication in the scientific and academic community, the term emotional intelligence was still virtually unheard of. When Daniel Goleman published his book on EI that same year, it quickly became a bestseller, and the concept of emotional intelligence was popularized, seemingly overnight.

In the 20-plus years since the publication of Goleman's book, hundreds of books and thousands of articles have been written on EI and related topics. And a great deal of controversy has sprung up, about both the definition and the measurement of EI. (We'll tackle the controversy about measurement in a future post.)

### **Controversy about the Definition of EI**

Not only do researchers and scholars differ on the definition of EI, these same researchers and scholars regularly amend their own definitions. It's clearly an indication of the growing interest in, and scrutiny of, the topic.

Following are some of the definitions of EI that have been offered over the years and later amendments:

- 1990 - Peter Salovey and John Mayer - emotional intelligence is: "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions."
- 1995 - Daniel Goleman - emotional intelligence - "knowing one's emotions," "managing emotions," "motivating oneself," "recognizing emotions in others" and "handling relationships."

- 1996 - Reuven Bar-On - emotional intelligence is: “an array of non-cognitive (emotional and social) capabilities, competencies and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures.”
- 1997 - Six Seconds Team - emotional intelligence is: “the capacities to create optimal results in your relationships with yourself and others.”
- [1998 - Daniel Goleman](#) - emotional intelligence is: “self-awareness, self regulation, motivation, empathy, social skill.”
- 2002 - Peter Salovey and John Mayer - emotional intelligence is: “The ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional meanings, and to reflectively regulate emotions in ways that promote emotional and intellectual growth.”
- [2004 - John Mayer](#) - emotional intelligence is: “the ability to accurately perceive your own and others’ emotions; to understand the signals that emotions send about relationships; and to manage your own and others’ emotions.”
- 2009 - Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves - emotional intelligence is: “your ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behaviour and relationships.”
- 2018 - Six Seconds Team - emotional intelligence is “the capacity to blend thinking and feeling to make optimal decisions.”

While the details of these definitions differ, what most all of these definitions have in common is the sense-making of emotions, one’s own and those of others, to achieve an ideal outcome in relationship.

We, at Learning in Action, align with much of that general definition. However, we see it as incomplete.

### **What’s Missing in Definitions of EI**



For the last 20-plus years, the colloquial use of the term *emotional intelligence* has been shorthand for “good with people.” The most emotional intelligent person in a heated room would be the one who was most able to stay present, calm and focused on the topic at hand, while staying connected with both themselves and others. If you buy into this shorthand, even a little, clearly, there’s more going on than simply being able to make sense of one’s own emotions and those of others.

From our perspective, several core capacities that are elemental to emotional intelligence are missing from the above definitions. For example, navigating challenging interpersonal terrain requires:

- Not simply relying upon the emotional dimension of our experience, but also relying on our thoughts and our wants/desires
- Not simply the recognition and understanding of emotions, but also the recognition and understanding of thoughts and desires/intentions of both oneself and others
- Not simply giving in or acquiescing to others, but also staying connected with oneself
- Not simply recognizing and understanding the emotions of others, but actually caring about and sharing in them
- Not simply allowing the patterns of past relationships to blind us to the present, but seeing and accepting ourselves, others and the world as it is and as we are.

Without these essential internal capacities, emotional intelligence simply isn't possible.

### **Learning in Action's Definition of Emotional Intelligence**

Our definition of EI is inspired and informed by the field of [interpersonal neurobiology](#). Thus, our approach to defining and measuring EI is based upon science, but not constrained by it.

We define emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, understand and rely equally on all dimensions of our internal experience (our thoughts, wants and feelings, not simply our emotions) and the internal experience of others, to accept and be present in the moment with who and what is, and to stay connected with and separate from others in order to navigate wisely the challenges of interpersonal relationships.

The theoretical underpinnings of our approach to EI recognize the ways in which we are all shaped by the relationships and experiences in our lives, not only metaphorically, but neurobiologically. How we are shaped impacts how we see, think, feel and experience ourselves, others and the world around us.

The end result of that shaping becomes our default experience - our patterns of thinking, feeling, wanting and focusing - that become the non-conscious backdrop to our lives and relationships. Only by becoming aware of how we've been shaped in ways we can't see, are we able to become emotionally intelligent. (That is the awareness created by the [EQ Profile](#)).

We believe that emotional intelligence is an inside job. While we don't diminish the importance of developing social skill, without the core capacities of emotional intelligence, it's akin to "putting lipstick on a pig."

The inner capacities that make up emotional intelligence can be developed once we are aware of them.

### **Creating Awareness**





Our core purpose at Learning in Action is to create greater awareness that leads to more choice and better relationships. Only by being aware of our default experience can we know what we are bringing into any challenging interpersonal situation.

Once we are aware of our non-conscious defaults - our patterns of thinking, feeling and wanting that have been shaped over the course of a lifetime - then (and only then) can we exercise more choice over who and how we want to be in relationship, and to create the relationships that we are proud of.

What about you? How do you define and measure emotional intelligence? Has it changed over time? How so, and why?

~ Alison Whitmire  
President | Learning in Action