eq•lab21

THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What if Plato and Descartes had overlooked a crucial facet of our intelligence by focusing only on our capacity to think rationally? Associated with mental fragility and derangement, emotions were for centuries obstructed, denigrated or hidden. Man's added value was deemed to be in his head, certainly not in his heart.

It was not until 1932 that the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded jointly to Sir Charles Scott Sherrington and Edgar Douglas Adrian "for their discoveries regarding the functions of neurons". The way was open; in the late 1960's, the field of neuroscience was created, revealing to the world the intelligence of emotions and the undeniable link between mind, heart, and body.

The term Emotional Intelligence (EI) was first introduced in 1990 by American psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer. Five years later, in 1995, emotional intelligence finally entered the public domain with the publication of Daniel Goleman's book **Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ**.

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions, as well as to recognize and influence the emotions of others [1].

Emotional Quotient (EQ) is its measure. In organizations, a high EQ translates into enhanced well-being, improved relationships and higher performance.

In today's world, the only constant is change; we live in an era of accelerated transformation, facing unprecedented challenges: massive digitalization, economic volatility, geopolitical tensions, and relentless pressure on performance.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IS A CRITICAL DIFFERENTIATOR. AN ESSENTIAL FOUNDATION FOR FOSTERING AGILITY. RESILIENCE AND COLLABORATION.

Emotional intelligence is a critical differentiator, an essential foundation, fostering agility, resilience and collaboration.

Technical skills, though essential, are no longer sufficient to guarantee success. It is our soft skills that enable us to ride the waves, successfully navigate change and fully harness technological innovations.

This white paper draws on insights from neuroscience to shed light on human functioning and the impact of emotions on our thoughts, our relationships, and our actions. Case studies and key publications illustrate the benefits of high emotional intelligence.

You will find examples of organisations that have implemented programs to strengthen the EI of their employees and leadership teams. Finally, we will provide measurement tools as well as concrete strategies to develop emotional intelligence in both individuals and teams.

[1] Salovey, P., et Mayer, J.D. (1990). "Emotional intelligence. Imagination, Cognition, and Personality."

(i) The Physiology of Emotions

The word **emotion** comes from the Latin **emovere**, "to set in motion". The primary function of emotions is to ensure our survival. An emotion is a signal sent to the brain to tell us that it's urgent to move, right now!

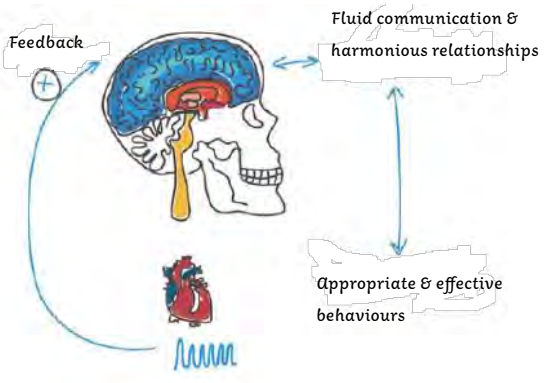
We can better understand this mechanism by looking back in time. Our ancestors' primary concern was to fend off danger and stay alive; when a predator approached, the ancestral brain, known as the "reptilian brain" was wired to hijack the intelligent brain and send a very simple message: "Run for your life!".

In as much as all emotions serve a purpose, they are all positive. We should therefore be careful of our vocabulary; rather than “positive” or “negative” emotions, it is more appropriate to refer to emotions as pleasant or unpleasant, constructive or destructive, healthy or toxic.

Let's look at these two diagrams, which illustrate the mechanism:

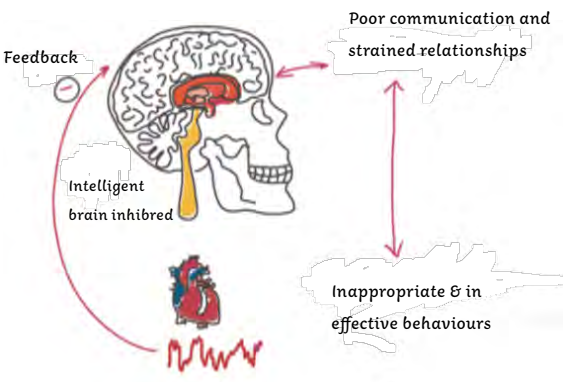
Regular heart rate, pleasant and gratifying emotional state (serenity, calm, ease, appreciation, curiosity, etc.)
The intelligent brain, or "neocortex", is fully functioning; relationships are harmonious, we are open, able to think objectively, analyze, and solve complex problems.

The resulting behaviours are both appropriate and effective, performance is optimal.



Irregular heart rate, unpleasant and harmful emotional state (frustration, irritation, anger, anxiety, fear, etc.)
Conversely, in a harmful emotional state, the intelligent brain is inhibited. We switch to "self-protection" mode, seeing things primarily from our own point of view; relationships are strained, we lose our ability to reflect, analyze, and solve problems.

At the exact moment when we most need our "intelligent brain", it is hijacked; the reptilian brain takes over, our reaction is instinctive rather than rational, often with dramatic consequences!



(ii) The Great Illusion

As we mentioned above, human beings seek happiness, peace, and serenity. This quest is legitimate; however, many of us harbour a great illusion that evil comes from the outside, that everything would be better if only the other person changed. "This client is driving me crazy... my colleague is annoying me... my boss is stressing me out..." Obviously, it's tempting to justify our frustrations and anger when we experience a situation that deviates from our "normality" or, even worse, when we harbour a feeling of injustice.

The chain of events is rapid; convinced we hold the **truth**, we communicate our disagreement in abrupt, aggressive and often destructive ways: contemptuous visual expressions, misplaced gestures, offensive body and verbal language... the relationship quickly becomes strained, communication worsens. In such a climate, it's difficult to move forward, collaboratively solving problems and finding new solutions.

"BETWEEN STIMULUS AND RESPONSE THERE IS A SPACE. IN THAT SPACE IS OUR POWER TO CHOOSE OUR RESPONSE. IN OUR RESPONSE LIES OUR GROWTH AND OUR FREEDOM."
VIKTOR E. FRANKL

Thankfully, this sequence of events is not inevitable. It is precisely in high-stake situations that emotional intelligence becomes so important; either we lose control of our emotions, or we remain in control, and are able to act with discernment and responsibility.

Here are two examples from the professional world:

Scenario 1: Employee with performance issues - feedback from the manager

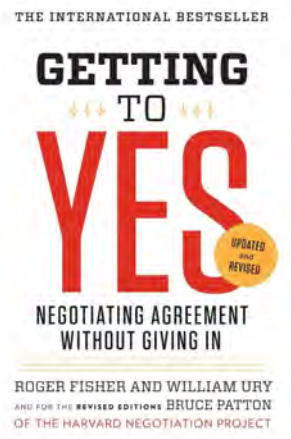
Low EQ	High EQ
• Angry, aggressive manager • Defensive employee • Attack/justification dynamic, poor or no listening • Damaged relationship • Unmotivated and helpless employee	• Manager is calm and in control of his/her emotional state • Facts and their impact are clearly presented • Open and constructive dialogue • Strengthened relationships and trust • Motivated and empowered employee

Scenario 2: typical managerial meeting

Low EQ	High EQ
"A" presents their point of view "B" abruptly disagrees "A" retorts in the same vein Tension escalates, side by side problem solving turns into face to face confrontation, communication deteriorates, the relationship is damaged, and the two parties reach a deadlock.	"A" presents their point of view "B" sees things differently and asks questions of "A" to better understand his/her position "A" explains and provides clarification "B" listens and confirms their understanding before sharing their own point of view The dialogue remains constructive; together, they develop a solution that meets the interests and constraints of both parties. The relationship is strengthened and collaboration is optimal.

Obviously, when both protagonists have a high EQ, relationship dynamics, communication, and problem-solving will be fluid and optimal.

Failing that, a person who remains calm and constructive can, through a mirror effect, calm and positively influence the other. As Roger Fisher, co-author of Getting to Yes and founding father of the Harvard Negotiation Project, so aptly puts it: *"Two heads are better than one, but one head is better than none!"*

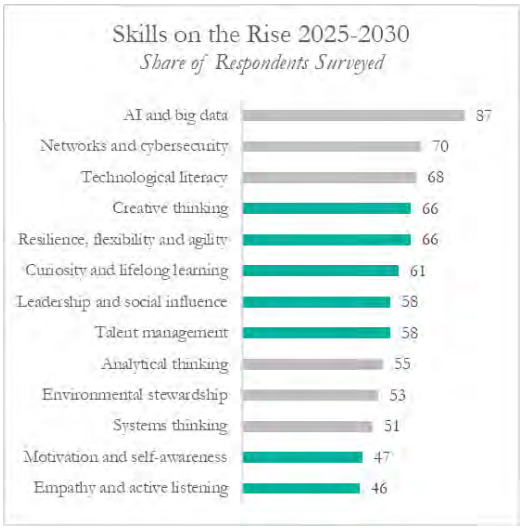


(i) Emotional intelligence, a highly valued and sought-after skill

The **World Economic Forum** highlights in its 2025 "Future of Jobs Report" [2] that 39% of the skills that are key today will no longer be relevant by 2030. Between 2025 and 2030, employers will be looking for both cutting-edge technological skills and essential human qualities. Resilience and agility (66%), curiosity and lifelong learning (61%), leadership and talent management (58%) are on the rise; over the next ten years, they will be top skills for organisations.

Leading universities around the world also recognize the importance of emotional intelligence and are developing specific curricula to train tomorrow's leaders in this discipline.

THE FUTURE OF WORK RELIES ON THE COMBINATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL AND HUMAN SKILLS



The academic offerings in emotional intelligence are wide ranging, with programs on EI offered by Harvard, Yale, UC Berkeley (via the edX platform), King's College London, the National University of Singapore, the Indian Institute of Management, to name just a few.

In France, ESCP offers a specialization in "Leadership and Emotional Intelligence" within several short programs. SKEMA also offers an in-house training program entitled "Managing with Emotional Intelligence."

[2] World Economic Forum (2025). "Future of Jobs Report: Emotional Intelligence as a Core Skill." https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/

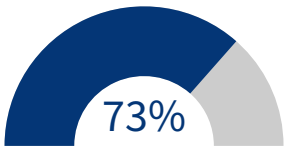
(ii) Impact on Performance

Organizations that strengthen and leverage emotional intelligence reap numerous benefits:

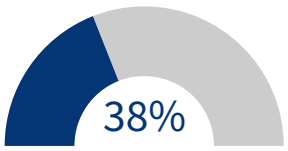
- Improved individual and team performance
- Positive and influential leadership
- Openness to change
- Greater innovation
- Strengthened relationships and collaboration
- Increased talent retention, employee engagement, and customer satisfaction
- Reduced absenteeism

The table below illustrates the positive relationship between a leader's level of emotional skills and their performance, based on various studies on the matter. For example, developing EI is estimated to generate an improvement in managerial performance of between +18% and +35% [3].

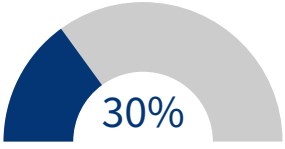
Category	Indicator	Impact (min to max)
Individual Performance	Managerial Performance	from 18% to 35%
	Decision-Making	from 20% to 30%
	Leadership Influence	from 20% to 45%
	Adaptability to Change	from 40% to 60%
Team Performance	Productivity	from 15% to 30%
	Quality of Work	from 20% to 40%
	Innovation	from 25% to 30%
	Collaboration	from 25% to 35%
Retention & Engagement	Talent Retention	from 25% to 40%
	Reduced Absenteeism	from 15% to 25%
	Internal Customer Satisfaction	from 20% to 30%
	Employee Engagement	from 20 to 35 points eNPS



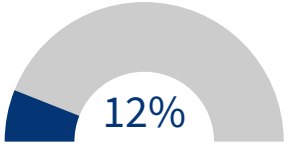
OF EMPLOYEES ARE NOT ENGAGED [4]



FEEL STRESS ON A DAILY BASIS [4]



ARE LOOKING FOR A NEW JOB DAILY [4]



OF THE WORKING POPULATION IS AT RISK OF BURN-OUT [5]

[3] These stats are based on various studies and reports published between 2017 and 2024. Harvard Business Review, McKinsey & Company, Gallup, the World Economic Forum, the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence, as well as studies by the Institute for Health and Human Potential or specialized firms (TalentSmart, Hay Group, Korn Ferry, Zenger/Folkman, etc.) relayed by professional publications

[4] Gallup. The State of the Global Workplace (2025) https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx

[5] MEDADUM (2024) https://info.medadom.com/professionnels-de-la-sante/les-chiffres-cles-du-burn-out-en-france

(iii) Greater resilience and innovation

As Alan Jope, former CEO of Unilever [6], points out, **leaders must first master their "inner game"**—their emotional state and energy—to excel in their **"outer game"** of leadership and innovation. A leader capable of managing emotions under pressure and demonstrating resilience will set an example for their team and remain clear-headed to guide the company through storms.

(iv) Emotional intelligence, the primary driver of entrepreneurial success

A meta-analysis of over 65,000 entrepreneurs revealed that **emotional intelligence explained nearly 89% of entrepreneurial success, compared to only 11% for IQ** [7]**.**

Brian Chesky, co-founder and CEO of Airbnb, provided a striking example during the Covid-19 pandemic [8]. Faced with an 80% drop in revenue, he was forced to lay off nearly 1,900 employees (25% of the workforce). Chesky chose **an approach based on transparency and empathy:** he sent out a direct message to the entire company, increased severance pay, the temporary continuation of health coverage, and the creation of an alumni directory to help affected employees.

The **positive impact was clear:** it created greater trust and psychological safety for everyone, infused positive energy, and increased team engagement.

Airbnb's foundations remain solid after this episode; employees are more engaged than ever, 2024 results are up 13% over the previous year.

SPOTLIGHT

Find out how Brian Chesky chose transparency and empathy when announcing Airbnb's layoffs, affirming that people remain at the heart of their strategy.

[6] Little Black Book (2021). Flexibility, Sustainability and Inner Mastery: Unilever Examines the Future of Work

[7] Jared S. Allen & others (2020). "What matters more for entrepreneurship success? A meta-analysis comparing general mental ability and emotional intelligence in entrepreneurial settings" https://sms.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/sej.1377

[8] A Message from Co-Founder and CEO Brian Chesky (May 2020) https://news.airbnb.com/a-message-from-co-founder-and-ceo-brian-chesky/

(v) When AI decodes emotions

Facial coding identifies emotions from facial expressions, captured by cameras and interpreted by algorithms. Based on **Paul Ekman** and **Wallace Friesen's** Facial Action Coding System (FACS), it breaks down micro-facial movements to analyze emotional reactions to a stimulus.

In marketing and communications, it allows us to determine in real time whether an advertisement captures or loses attention, as demonstrated by campaigns conducted by Unilever and Kellogg's using Affectiva's Affdex technology.

In media and entertainment, it is used to adjust the intensity of content to the viewer's emotions, making the experience more immersive.

As such, facial coding transforms unconscious microexpressions into actionable data. From advertising to road safety, it illustrates how **technology can capture and analyze emotional signals,** and improve engagement with end users, thereby representing a significant opportunity for many businesses.

IN SUMMARY

The greatest 21st century leaders combine technical expertise and emotional skills to inspire and lead change. As **Daniel Goleman** writes, **EQ is proving to be a powerful predictor of managerial effectiveness**. The good news is that unlike IQ that reaches a peak and declines with age, EQ can be developed throughout our lives. The result is enhanced well-being, healthier social interactions, improved effectiveness and performance.

Unlike the examples above and the figures that prove the benefits of a high EQ, what is the impact of the opposite? What happens to a person with a low EQ? How will they ride the waves during an unwanted situation, an illness, a problem with a client, or any other challenging life event?

Harmful emotions --> broken relationships
"You don't leave a company, you leave a manager," they say. Relationships with colleagues, and especially with management, have a significant impact on employee motivation and engagement. Indeed, a strained, conflictual, or toxic relationship in the workplace is among the primary reasons for leaving.

Destructive emotions --> destroyed couples
Couples come together and separate based on emotions. Professor **John Gottman** has studied relationships for over thirty years in his "love laboratory" at the University of Washington [9]. His teams analysed behaviours and physiological reactions: choice of words, tone of voice, heart rate, sweating, lip puckering, eye rolling... They can predict future divorces with a 95% accuracy rate, sometimes within just three minutes of witnessing a disagreement.

We are at the mercy of our emotions!
Van Gogh was right, we are mere puppets, at the mercy of our emotions. "Let's not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it." Politicians, advertisers, and influencers know this well. Fake news triggers waves of fear that change our beliefs and behaviours. More subtly, influencers encourage unnecessary purchases, just to appear "cool and trendy."

Emotional hijacking operated by social media
Social media is flooding children and adolescents with blinding emotions. Hyperconnectivity causes major damage to health and development. Addiction stems from the "four happy hormones": **dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine, and endorphins.** At each log-on, social media triggers an irresistible cocktail of positive emotions: excitement, surprise, belonging, peer recognition, pride, gratification... Such powerful stimulation massively outweighs the effort required to read a book, to acquire knowledge, and even to interact face to face with a person who could challenge or disagree with you.

Damaging emotions --> damaged well-being and health
MRI imaging now makes it possible to measure the impact of harmful emotions on the brain and body: blood pressure, muscle contractions, hormonal secretions, and mental fog. When worry turns to anxiety, or frustration turns to anger, cortisol invades the body. In the long term, this excess leads to burnout and sometimes serious illnesses such as depression, diabetes, or cancer.

It is becoming clear that without awareness of the power of emotions and their ability to dominate us, we quickly lose control. Life is not a long, calm river; the pressure is constantly increasing. To ride these waves, emotional mastery remains our most valuable tool.

[9] https://www.gottman.com/

The motivating thing about emotional intelligence is that it is not innate and static throughout one's life. Companies have understood this and are increasingly integrating Emotional Intelligence into their recruitment, training, and coaching programs.

However, developing emotional intelligence requires more than a simple one-off training session: to ensure a strong ROI and optimise results, our recommendation is o combine (i) an assessment of how the individual naturally functions, (ii) in-person or online training sessions, and (iii) sustained, on the job practice.

Many organizations, across all sectors, have built programs to embed emotional intelligence at the heart of their culture.

Here are some illustrative examples:

SIY global

Google

The **Search Inside Yourself (SIY)** program, originally developed at Google, combines mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and neuroscience to enhance leadership.

Participants report improvements in stress management, resilience, and focus, while increasing engagement, productivity, and organizational performance.

Now available in over 50 countries, it is used by numerous organizations to combine well-being and performance.

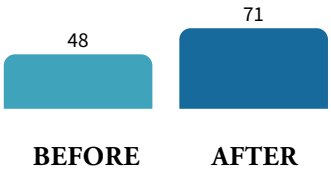
EI IS A PERFORMANCE ENHANCER WHEN INDIVIDUALS AND COMPANIES KNOW HOW TO FUEL AND NURTURE IT.

Illustrative benefits of the SIY program as showcased on their website; share of respondents before and after their program

I use a deliberate technique to calm myself when I am in the middle of a stressful situation (%)

I feel that I can bounce back quickly after an emotionally challenging situation (%)

I am able to notice when my attention has wandered, and return to the present (%)



Zappos has built its reputation by putting emotional intelligence at the heart of their customer experience. The company recruits and trains its teams around values like empathy and authentic communication, giving employees the freedom to personalize each interaction. This approach fosters the creation of unexpected "WOW moments" that positively surprise customers, strengthen their loyalty, and foster an internal culture of accountability.

Sanofi trained 70 salespeople at its US subsidiary in Emotional Intelligence. The trained group received workshops, coaching, and mentoring, while a control group received no support. The trained managers saw their emotional intelligence quotient improve by 18% and their sales grow by 13% compared to the control group.

Oracle invested in emotional intelligence training to strengthen the interpersonal skills of its sales force. Salespeople learned to better understand their customers' emotions and improve their communication style. The impact was spectacular: a **92% increase in optimism and an 89% increase in confidence** among participants, resulting in a profound transformation of the sales culture.

Over the years, several **EQ measurement and assessment tools** have been developed. These psychometric tests allow organizations to assess their employees' emotional quotient (EQ), an essential first step in targeting specific skills to develop.

MHS (Multi-Health Systems) is the world's leading publisher of psychometric tools dedicated to emotional intelligence. Here are the two most widely used:

EQ-i 2.0®
assess. predict. perform.

- **What it is:** Developed from the Bar-On model, it assesses 15 skills divided into five dimensions (self-perception, individual expression, interpersonal skills, decision-making, stress management)

- **Pros:**
  - 17 years of scientific research
  - Recognized worldwide: over 3 million users, 65 countries, 30 languages
  - Standardized on over 200,000 people
  - Scientifically validated
  - Results easily transferable to the field

- **Uses:** Leadership development and soft skills in general

MSCEIT®2
Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test™
Second Edition

- **What it is:** A test that assesses four domains of EI (emotion perception, thought facilitation, emotion understanding, and emotion management). It includes a total of 141 items.

- **Pros:**
  - Solid scientific basis
  - Unlike self-assessment, it measures the ability to identify different emotions and understand their subtleties
  - Unbiased and objective results

- **Uses:** Well-suited for those wishing to deepen their emotion identification skills. Longer to complete (30–45 minutes) and with no direct connection to the professional world, it is less common in the corporate world.

Best Practices
- These tests must be administered and interpreted by certified professionals.
- Confidentiality: The results belong to the individual concerned; no oral or written communication to others is permitted.

Here are some best practices to shift from theory to action:

FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

Make EI a Strategic Priority
- Integration of EI into the organisational vision and values
- Allocation of a dedicated budget for EI development
- Appointment of ambassadors and executive sponsors to lead the EI transformation

Start from the top
- Assessment and development of the leadership team's EI
- Demonstration of exemplary behaviour, attitude and actions
- Regular communication on the importance of EI

A Systems Approach
- Integration of EI into all HR processes
- Training and support for managers
- Creation of a culture where appropriate emotional expression is valued

FOR HR PROFESSIONALS

Start with a Precise Diagnosis
- Assessment of your management team's current EI level (EQ-i Leadership or EQI-360)
- Identification of gaps by employee type / business area
- Measurement of the EI-performance correlation
- Establishment of a baseline to measure progress

A Structured Program
- Selection of certified and experienced training partners
- Development of a curriculum adapted to your organizational culture
- Solution for long-term support
- Integration of EI into your talent development processes

Measurement and communication of results
- EI KPIs linked to business objectives, clearly communicated
- Regular dissemination of successes and learnings
- Creation of a co-development community
- Sharing of best practices

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

Emotional intelligence is not a secondary concept but a **strategic lever for performance and growth**. It enhances well-being as well as economic success.

Investing in emotional intelligence means investing in a true "human ROI": more engaged employees, more satisfied customers, more dynamic and resilient organizations.

eq·lab21

www.eqlab21.com