

# Fact-File 10: Developing emotionally intelligent teams...10 Dimensions.

Extracts from our **Guide on EI at Work: Working with Emotional Intelligence**



## The Emotional Side of Teams

Teams are everywhere these days – they've become the dominant way we organise work. We can all name very good reasons for working in teams – things like:

- ❑ Tapping collective thinking and doing power that's greater than any single individual
- ❑ Enabling better co-ordination, communication and blending more skills together to do more
- ❑ Handling projects that are too big, complex or involved for a single person to do it all.

While we naturally form teams to achieve things together we couldn't do alone, it seems working well together in teams doesn't come so naturally – we have to learn how to do this. Far too often, people find teams time-consuming, frustrating and exhausting, rather than exhilarating, involving and effective. *Why is that?*

It looks like it has a fair bit to do with *Emotional Intelligence* (EI). There's an emotional revolution going on right now, stemming from a growing recognition that emotions do, after all, play a big part in all human endeavour. And nowhere is the notion of Emotional Intelligence (EI) more crucial than in our relationships with others – and *how well we work together in teams*.

More and more we are beginning to recognise that emotional skills like perseverance, resilience, self-confidence, self-motivation, connectivity and empathy are at the heart of good teamwork and healthy, energetic organisations.



*“What makes a team perform better than the best person on it? That question is key. Outstanding team performance raises the “group IQ” - the sum total of the best talents of each member on a team, contributed to their fullest. When teams operate at their best, the results can be more than simply additive - they can be multiplicative, with the best talents of one person catalyzing the best of another and another, to produce results far beyond what any one person might have done. The explanation of this aspect of team performance lies in the member relationships - in the chemistry between team members.”*  
Daniel Goleman *Working with EI* p. 205

Skills like these are 'must-haves' for happy, productive workplaces where people get along well with each other – where there's a real sense of team. *When they're not there, we notice.*

## Team Train-Wrecks and EI



Significant numbers of us lack emotional skills and the conversational competencies you need to form/maintain healthy team relationships.

In recent survey work we've done with teams, lack of EI is the most frequently named root-cause that leads to team failure – factors like...

- ❑ Toxic team climates, psychological safety and personality or relationship 'issues'
- ❑ Tendencies to be harsh, critical, disrespectful or disapproving of one another
- ❑ Anger, frustration, conflict, arguments or high levels of defensiveness
- ❑ Abrupt, abrasive, directive or confrontational patterns of communication
- ❑ Lack of acknowledgement, recognition, trust
- ❑ Bad moods – being snapped or shouted at
- ❑ Team fatigue – feeling worn out, pressured,
- ❑ No "fun" – not feeling buoyant or energised

All teams need to be able to deal with issues like climate, cohesiveness, communication and controversy at some time – and EI is central to this. The way we talk to each other, how we come across to others and how much respect, positive regard and collaboration there is in a team has a lot more to do than you may think with our levels of emotional intelligence.

## Emotionally Intelligent Teams

Daniel Goleman, populariser of EI, defines EI as *“the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.”*

EI is a set of brain-based competencies we all learn, which help regulate our own emotions, read emotions in others and act in ways that help us empathise, connect and relate – as well as understand what's going on for us feeling-wise.

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EI is what helps us get along with others. It's also what enables some of us to cope better with frustration or control our emotional outbursts. Its absence brings on irritation and negativity and poisons relationships.

Goleman says there are 4 major EI Dimensions – which he calls *self-awareness*, *self-management*, *social awareness* and *relationship management*.



Although it all starts with individual awareness, Goleman's 4 Dimensions apply collectively to teams just as much as they do to individuals.

## ? When emotionally intelligent people come together do you automatically get a more emotionally intelligent team?

It would be great if the answer was 'yes'? Yet, in many teams I've worked with, while individuals had high levels of EI, when they came together to talk over sensitive or critical issues such as upsetting behaviour, commitment, information-sharing or dealing with relational difficulties that always arise in teams – the level of emotional tension and discomfort was devastating.

- Different dynamics come into play in teams. It takes more than emotionally intelligent individuals getting along well one-on-one to build an emotionally intelligent team.
- Teams take on an emotional intelligence of their own. They have their collective moods and feelings just like individuals do (in fact, they often *'feel'* collectively, *because* feelings are catchy).

While Team EI depends on the EI levels of the individuals in it, it's more than that. It's the collective EI of the team that counts.

In their article 'Tapping into your Team's Emotional Intelligence', Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee relate the story of one manager who "displayed excellent empathy and relationship-building skills - he just couldn't read the team's emotional reality, and he was always out of synch. Most of the time, these problems and other interpersonal issues become the focus of team building. When we looked deeper, however, we found the real problem was a combination of ineffective norms and a negative emotional tone of the team. There was little self-awareness on the part of individuals or the team as a whole about their own group process: They did not manage individual team members' emotions or the group's moods very well, and they spent a lot of time and energy managing the team's negative emotions. In essence, it did not feel good to be part of the team, and people were avoiding working together..." Harvard Business School Working Knowledge Article 4/8/2002

Everyone contributes to overall EI team climate, especially the emotional tone the leader sets. A leader skilled in creating good feelings can keep cooperation high. There's even research that shows that humour at work can stimulate creativity, open lines of communications and enhance a sense of trust.

## Does this Team Feel Good?

If EI is one of the differentials between effective teams and ineffective ones, the really key element underneath this is whether people have good feelings about working in this team.

A team's effectiveness depends on how well it works together in harmony. Good work relationships mean making positive emotional connections with each other – what we tend to call *'likingness'*! This takes *empathy* – or what we often call *connectivity*.



The more emotional connection there is in your team, the more people feel friendly, happy, enthused, interested, focussed.

Morale tends to be high – climates are positive.

The reverse applies too. Apathy, anger, aggression, anxiety, cynicism, contempt or sullen silence set off negative emotional chain-reactions that turn team climates toxic.

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- ❑ EI builds positive climates and 'can-do' team cultures.
- ❑ It's what lifts levels of achievement, focus, optimism, joy, purpose and decreases dysfunctional behaviour and other drawbacks to good teamwork.
- ❑ When people feel good, they work better – they're more creative, and more productive.
- ❑ Good feelings are like lubrication for the brain – mental efficiency goes up, memory is sharpened, people can understand directions and make better decisions

Studies show this to be especially true with teams because emotions are contagious. When one or two people are in a good mood, it spreads easily to other members. Other studies recently have focused on the influence Team EI seems to have on team performance.

## TEAM EI and Superior Performance

When it comes to getting superior performance, it looks like Team EI is simply critical – and teams can raise their EI level by understanding their individual and collective emotional patterns and tendencies and learning to manage them more effectively.



Jordan and Troth recently researched the link between EI and team performance with problem-solving. They reckoned teams with higher levels of EI should perform better than teams with lower EI – and they were right!

They were also right in predicting these same teams would take a more collaborative approach and have less conflict achieving the task. Again they were on the money!

They concluded that *“teams composed of individuals high in emotional intelligence, particularly the ability to deal with one's own emotions, may be more inclined to listen to alternative viewpoints and seek superior solutions without feeling threatened by the possibility of being wrong.”* (Managing emotions during team problem solving: Emotional intelligence and conflict resolution. Human Performance 17:195-218. 2004)

## 10 Dimensions for EI Teams...

Over the past few years, we've isolated a number of factors that impact on Team EI. Teams that want to build better EI need to agree norms or operating principles to enact each of these **10 Dimensions for EI Teams**.

**1. Emotional Awareness:** is about how tuned-in we are to our emotional patterns: what we feel, why we feel that way, whether we can name our feelings and see the effect they have on how we think, behave and relate to others. Teams as an entity also develop emotional patterns that can either help or hinder it to function effectively. Teams need a way to articulate what's going on for each member and address interpersonal and other issues of safety and inclusion.

**2. Emotional Candour:** is being open, honest, and direct in how we deal with feelings in the team - courageously bringing feelings out into the open and dialoguing about how they affect the team's work. If emotions are avoided, there is a false or superficial tone that *“everything's fine.”* Surprisingly few teams reflect on emotional undercurrents, how these affect how well they work together and how it feels to be in the team.

Teams need skills to express emotions, and give feedback about how they feel and how things are impacting them, others and the work of the team.

**3. Emotional Control:** Just as important as awareness is ability to regulate emotions. Just as individuals can be emotionally hijacked, so can teams. People take their emotional cues from those around them. Something that seems upsetting can seem not so bad, depending on how colleagues smooth feathers or fan flames. The ability to regulate team emotions comes from establishing ways to handle both crucial confrontations and offer caring support.

**4. Connectivity:** In functional teams, people have affinity with each other. They relate to each other well, build strong bonds and connect comfortably. Teams who like, respect and trust each other are more cohesive than those where there's personal dislikes, enmity, rivalry, lack of appreciation of each other's roles or indifference.

**5. Collaborative Conversations:** are the main way teams connect with each other. Teams that talk together well about anything, are often more cohesive – they stick together and stay together.

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The calibre of conversations a team has is often a telling indicator of team health and functionality. High functioning teams have effective dialogues where they think together – low functioning teams tend to have poor conversations that go to argument or avoid hard issues, leaving people feeling disgruntled, dissatisfied and disconnected.

**6. Constructive Confrontations:** Teams can't work together without having personalities that bump up against each other. Admitting to this is the first step in finding common ground for resolving issues and conflict constructively. In any team, people cross lines and confrontation becomes necessary. How teams handle difficult situations and tensions is the real test of EI. Teams need to learn emotionally intelligent ways of confronting each other, restoring safety, staying in dialogue during hard issues and putting their views persuasively in ways that respect others.

**7. Vision and purpose:** All teams need to know what they are here for and have a vision of where they are going and what they're aiming for. When teams have a common purpose that matters to them and a shared vision they can all relate to, it provides inspiration and extra energy. The emotional states of focus and flow have a lot to do with feeling that what the team is here for is worthwhile.

**8. Cohesion and commitment:** A feeling among team members they belong to a worthwhile team with a healthy self-identity they're proud of; that individuals feel appreciated and their contribution is valued. Cohesion means team members have found good reasons to stick together, stay united and work together collectively, rather than do their own thing, act individually, pursue individual goals or fragment into factions and cliques. It also means put the team first, be able to commit to the team's goals, collaborate with others to get things done and joint accountability for what happens.

**9. Resilience and positivity:** Resilience is the 'bounce-back' emotion – ability to recover from set-backs, failure and disappointments that come a team's way. Emotional states such as self-efficacy, optimism, positivity and happiness fuel resilience. Efficacy is the 'can-do', 'we're capable' attitude – the belief that the team can perform well and a recognition that being on the team leads to positive emotions that energize, motivate and enable people to achieve team and individual challenges. For example, some teams on the

whole seem to be positive and can-do, while others are negative and everything's a struggle.

**10. Climate and Culture:** The emotional climate a team creates through the conversations and other interactions has a big impact in terms of people feeling safe to bring up and work through hard issues with each other, give feedback and handle differences. Team climate is determined by things like how safe, respected, listened to, supported and understood each member feels – it's what the atmosphere of the team feels like (eg cold, distant, warm, welcoming etc). Culture is the culmination of many different patterns – patterns of thinking, behaving, talking, rites, rituals and customs. It consists of many different footprints, and one of those is most definitely emotional. In some ways, climate and culture are the result of everything else that happens in the other dimensions – and that's why we put it last.

As teams decide to develop the 10 dimensions, benefits start to appear in terms of performance, productivity, engagement, focus, team spirit and trust.

Attending to the emotional climate of your team may seem like pandering to personalities and egos – yet instinctively we all monitor the social climate of our group all the time. Research trends emerging from business organisations around the globe are demonstrating that emotions impact heavily on productivity, team relationships, creativity, achievement and learning – and that's too important to ignore!

The Change Forum runs a 1-day clinic **Social Intelligence: EI in Teams**, a 1-day staff seminar: **EI at Work** and a 2-day leader clinic **Personal Mastery: Leading with Emotional Intelligence**. For brochures & information:

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