

Fact-File 31: Feelings, Values, Behaviour... cornerstones of constructive cultures



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

EI: Why it Matters

Many of us were brought up believing we should keep emotions to ourselves – that they get in the way of rational work practices. But you can't keep emotions out of workplaces. Thankfully – because they play a positive role in doing good work – just as much as they do sometimes get in the way.

There's now a growing recognition that emotions matter for good work, good relationships and a good life. Work, school or home, emotions background everything we do. They:

- ❑ Influence our moods, decisions, actions – our entire outlook on life and work.
- ❑ Have a big impact on how we behave and how well we get along with others at work
- ❑ Impact health due to a direct link between immune system and emotional centres
- ❑ Are an important, but often overlooked part of the cultural mix of a workplace
- ❑ Have a lot to do with how much respect, support and positivity there is at work
- ❑ Determine how satisfied, motivated, happy, healthy and effective we are in work and life

“EI is the foundation for a host of critical work life skills - focus, concentration, teamworking, communication, leadership and relationship-building - accounting for 58% of performance in all types of jobs overall. 90% of high-performers are high in EI, while only 20% of low performers are (in EI-2 by Bradberry & Greaves p 20-21)

Being able to understand, tune into and use emotions positively is the key to building happy, productive, connected workplaces that are warm, welcoming, inspiring and supportive. *And that's where EI skills come in handy.*

EI: What is it really?

While we all have emotions, being able to handle them well doesn't always come naturally to most of us. *Emotional Intelligence* (EI) is not just a random concept – it's a real brain function.

We're equipped with emotional circuitry hard-wired into us, but instructions on how to use this well has to be learned.

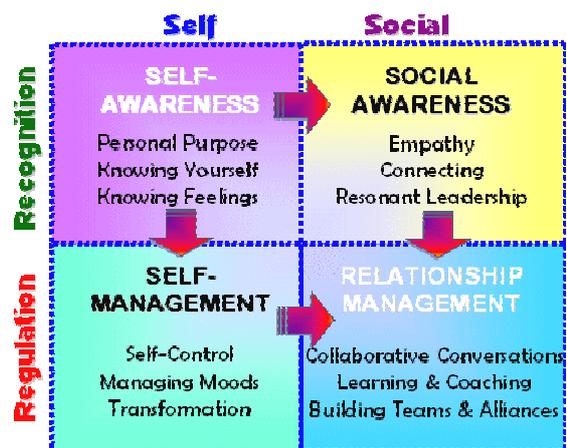
- ❑ EI is the ability to tune into and understand our own emotional patterns and see how they affect what we say and do at work.

- ❑ It's also about our ability to connect with other people's feelings, get along well with them and have good working relationships.

On another level, EI's about learning to control those disruptive emotions we all fall victim to sometimes – what we call 'mood management'. Very simply put, *EI is about:*

- ❑ Knowing my emotional patterns, how they affect me and controlling my moods
- ❑ Seeing how my feelings impact others
- ❑ Choosing how I think, feel and act (not be controlled by or at the whim of my feelings)
- ❑ The ability to relate to/get on well with others
- ❑ Communicating what I feel clearly and...
- ❑ Connecting with others – or empathy.

Daniel Goleman says there are **4 EI dimensions** (pictured below) you can use to assess where you can improve your emotional intelligence:



- 1. SELF-AWARENESS:** being alert to what we feel in the moment. Knowing how your moods influence your thinking and behaviour.
- 2. SELF-MANAGEMENT:** managing your moods and feelings better – especially touchy ones.
- 3. SOCIAL AWARENESS:** handling feelings/emotions better in relationships with others in your work team and having a good idea of how your feelings impact others. This includes the most powerful of EI practices, *empathy* – the ability to tune-in to how others feel in the moment which builds rapport and creates connection.
- 4. RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT:** is more than just being friendly or social. It means accurately reading social interactions; relating smoothly and using EI skills to persuade, lead and negotiate.

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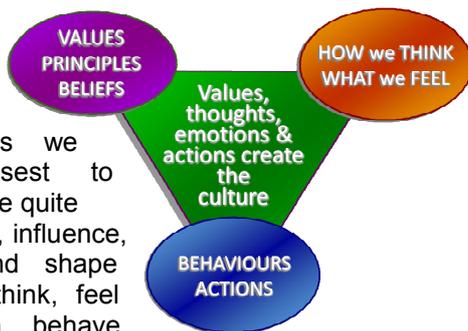
EI skills like perseverance, resilience, empathy, self-confidence and self-motivation are what lift your levels of achievement, focus, optimism, joy, purpose, perseverance. They're also what decrease dysfunctional emotional patterns like anger, that turn teams toxic, poison relationships and act as drawbacks to good work.

Feelings, Values and Behaviour

They're all essential cornerstones if you want to build positive, supportive and constructive team cultures. But what's EI got to do with team values and behaviour? Everything – because emotions drive behaviour.

EI is the crucial skillset that determines how well we balance personal values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and behaviour with others in the team, handle differences, resolve conflict and pull together. The link between values, behaviour and feelings is so simple it's often simply overlooked.

As this diagram shows, values – the things we hold closest to us and take quite personally, influence, inform and shape how we think, feel and then behave. Let's unpack these links more.



- ❑ Values are what we stand for – guiding principles that we'll also tend to stand up for.
- ❑ They're a special set of what's called '*mental models*' – deeply embedded, often taken-for-granted beliefs or assumptions about the way things should be that shape how we see and think about things and how we act as a result.
- ❑ Many tensions and conflicts in workplaces erupt over value-clashes. When someone says or does something that conflicts with our deeply-held values, we get defensive.
- ❑ Values influence how we think and what we feel. These deep patterns of thoughts and emotions in turn govern patterns of behaving
- ❑ At a collective level, these things have a lot to do with the culture we experience at work.

When teams use these links in a conscious way to positively align values, emotions and behaviour

it creates a sense of clarity. We feel a connection to others and a part of what's going on. People are happy, energised and productive and they can achieve great things together.

When teams ignore these links, values, emotions and behaviours can get out of synch, It creates confusion and a sense of disparity, tensions arise, resentments mount and teams turns toxic.

Let's look more closely at values and behaviour.

Emotions and Values

At the core of every team, culture or organisation are values. Whether they're visible, intentional or not, they inform all aspects of organisational life – from how we define our purpose and go about our business to the attitudes and behaviour of the people we work with. In a team, values are beliefs and attitudes you share in common about a whole range of different aspects such as:

- ❑ How people should behave and the way management and leadership should be.
- ❑ How clients and customers should be treated and the way teams and individuals should treat each other and work together.

Values that are clearly spelt out, commonly understood and shared provide an anchor and a source of energy, inspiration and commitment to accomplishing things because they matter – which are all emotions-based.

- ❑ Common values keep teams together and ensure everyone's going the same way.
- ❑ Lack of these leads to uncertainty over decisions and directions, conflict and half-hearted commitment to action.



Values are not intangible – they're visible. They underpin our actions and behaviour and influence the kind of workplaces and teams we design – and how they operate. To see them in action, look at what people do or listen to what they say.

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We often don't think so, but emotions and values go hand-in-hand. Why? Because every value we hold can be linked to certain feelings and actions it generates. For example: It's no use holding respect as a value unless we *feel* respectful to others. We can have caring as a value but unless we *feel* caring, it's empty words.

Values are what we care about most and give priority to. They shape our thoughts, perceptions, choices, decisions, responses and actions. So when someone questions our values, we're likely to get emotional! The 'EI Triangle' (pictured below) is based on 3 simple connections that show how this happens:

- ❑ Thoughts trigger or fuel certain feelings. Feelings flow with thoughts: Brain-wise, our feelings and thoughts are wired together.
- ❑ Emotions lead us to act in certain way: To become more aware of our feelings and manage them better, we have to know how thoughts influence our feelings – and how feelings in turn lead us to act or behave.
- ❑ Actions generate more thoughts and feelings: Once we act (eg. yell, criticise etc) this locks us into a vicious circle – more angry thoughts, more agitated feelings.

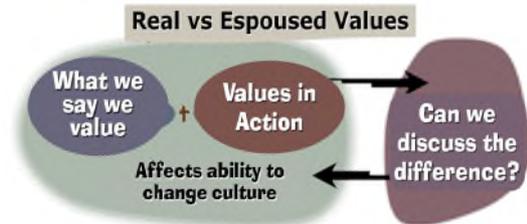


Shadowy Values

Just stating values won't automatically improve things. The walls of many workplaces have framed values statements that mean little to the people who actually work there. Often what an organisation does or how people in it behave is at odds with what it says it values. This is the level of espoused values. Fast-food chains want us to believe they have our nutritional well-being at heart... and you'd have to question that one?

- ❑ There's a strong tendency to think the things we believe in are consistent with our actions. 'We say we hold certain values, which we claim are reflected in our actions (*espoused values*).
- ❑ On the other hand, there are values implied by our actual behaviour (*values-in-action*). The two are very often at odds, but people tend not to be aware of this.

- ❑ The gap between the values we say we hold and the actions we take indicates there are other undisclosed mental models at play. It's only when people can discuss gaps like these that real values and culture change.



Shadow (espoused) values everyone knows about, but can't name or discuss (usually due to fear of alienation, retribution or ridicule) are a big barrier to enacting values. While people may not say them out loud, they still *'think'* these things and act them out in various ways.

The conflict between shadow values and values we say we hold is often the cause of toxic emotional behaviour.

The trick is turning values into action... then making work systems, operating principles, leadership and behaviour consistent with them. On a personal level, it's making sure the values we hold – our *espoused* values – match up with our values *in use*.

EI and Behaviour

A core concept of EI is recognising your feelings, their effects on you and others around you and managing your moods. It's about expressing feelings appropriately, without ire, blame or recrimination. Managing moods means:

- ❑ Knowing your feelings, tuning into them and knowing how they affect your behaviour
- ❑ Learning to control or regulate your moods and emotions – curbing those impulses to say and do things that damage others
- ❑ Saying what you feel in honest and respectful ways that don't make others defensive

Why bother? Well, that's the second EI concept.

Emotions are contagious. We catch them like 'flu, but much faster. When we manage moods well – we're cheery, optimistic, supportive or connective – people act the same. We 'resonate' emotionally with each other. This helps us retain energy, handle stress and remain emotionally balanced and creates a positive emotional work climate.

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- ❑ Bad moods are equally infectious. When we act cranky, impatient, intolerant, cynical or sullen, we infect others with toxic feelings and people treat you the same.
- ❑ If you're abrupt, they'll be rude back. If you blame, they'll blame back. When you attack, expect a counter-attack. It's the amygdala at work again – defending us from threats!



Those who can't, or won't, control their negative feelings, and come to work constantly cranky and in bad moods create a toxic climate over the long term. We all need to be emotionally responsible.

Lack of EI costs in terms of toxic work climates, bad relationships, poor teamwork, stress, fear, anxiety, low morale and dysfunctional behaviours like disrespect and ongoing stand-offs – but they often go unnoticed. This brings up another EI concept – *emotional hijacks*.

The amygdala is our fear centre. In situations where emotions run high, we're at risk of being hijacked by them. Feelings control what we say and do because our brain is wired to feel first, and think second.

When our amygdala takes over, our rational brain takes a backseat. We act in ways that make things worse, escalate bad feelings, damage relationships and we generate negative, unhealthy emotions. It's summed up when we say: "I didn't think – it just came out that way". That's an 'emotional hijack'. Learning how to manage our feelings, moods and stress reactions helps us avert or lessen toxic behaviours.

Working on Values & Behaviour

Here's a few activities to help articulate team values and EI behaviours to support them:

1: Stand Up. To help focus on team values and behaviour protocols, discuss questions like:

- ? What do we stand for? What do we do that really matters to me? What will we stand up for – our important shared values and beliefs.
- ? What won't we stand for? Things we don't approve of/would like less of in this team

2: Values into Actions. Values are actioned by turning them into concrete behaviour statements or operating principles. For each value, the team brainstorms a list of behaviours to enact/live it.

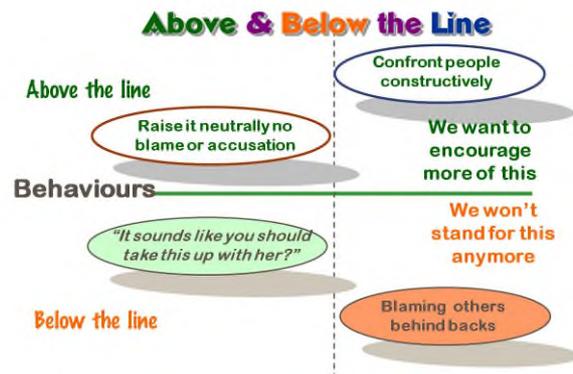
3: Match Values to Visions. Try listing what values support your team's key vision themes.

4. Make Values Explicit. Take your team values and tease out the detail on what this value is really about – don't leave it at motherhood-style, single words like 'respect' or 'trust'. Get to what's really behind the value.

5: Matching Team Values. The more personal values mesh with the team, the more cohesion there is. List your personal values then ask:

- ? What does this value mean to me? Why is it important for me?
- ? What is the impact (positive, negative) of me holding this value on others? What effect does this have on me, my feelings and behavior patterns?

6: Above-and-below-the-line: Brainstorm with the team behaviour patterns that are *Above the line* (constructive behaviours) and *Below the line*, (destructive or disruptive behaviours).



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