

Emotional Intelligence: What can be Changed?

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Given the growing popularity of the concept of emotional intelligence, it is important to acknowledge the current controversy about overstated claims and the lack of convincing evidence based research supporting the ability to "increase" emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman's (1995) popularization of the concept began with some carefully-worded suggestions about the power of EI and its potential for prediction in life. Those claims also reflected some considerable optimism: "No one can yet say exactly how much of the variability from person to person in life's course it accounts for. But what data exist suggest it can be as powerful, and at times more powerful, than IQ. (Goleman, 1995, p. 34). "

The claims were featured on the U.S. edition's cover, which also added the phrase "Why it can matter more than IQ," to the book's title. Upon release of Goleman's book, Time Magazine ran a cover story on emotional intelligence and the quote on the bottom left of the cover read: "It's not your IQ. It's not even a number. But emotional intelligence may be the best predictor of success in life, redefining what it means to be smart. (Time, October 2nd, 1995, cover)." The statement indicates that EI can't be quantified ("Its not even a number") and at the same time the author(s) go on to make quantitative claims for the concept (i.e., "the best predictor of success...").

There exists some limited evidence that specific EI skills and competencies can be increased through structured training, coaching and development programs (e.g., Cherniss, et al., 1998; Cherniss, 2000). Despite these limited claims, it is important to be cautious about the extent to which specific interventions can actually increase the four major building blocks of EI (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and relationship management). Some of the most promising evidence based EI related changes appear to be in the area of increasing happiness (Lyubmirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

Major Factors Influencing Happiness

Three primary factors appear to influence happiness (Lyubmirsky et al., 2005): 1) Genetic set point (50%); 2) Circumstances (10%) and 3) Intentional Activity (40%). It is well established that individuals adapt rapidly to life changes (both positive and negative) and soon return to their baseline levels of happiness (Seligman, et al., 2005). The happiness set point is genetically determined and is assumed to be fixed, stable over time, and immune to influence or control. At present it appears that focusing on the set point is not a fruitful avenue for happiness increase. However, one can suggest that non-genetic factors also influence a person's chronic happiness level, helping to determine whether the person falls in the lower or upper portion of his or her potential range at a particular time (circumstances and intentional activity).

Current research data suggest that changes in circumstances have limited potential for producing sustainable changes in happiness. Although this strategy can work in the short term, it probably will not work in the long term. However, we assume that, at best, satisfying basic needs of individuals can move people only up to their set point, but not beyond. There is good reason to believe that intentional activity can influence well-being. For example, some types of *behavioral* activity, such as exercising regularly or trying to be kind to others, are associated with well-being (e.g., Gisser et al., 2005; Nowack, 1994) as are cognitive activities (e.g., such as reframing situations in a more positive light or pausing to count one's blessings) or *volitional* activities (e.g., striving for important personal goals or devoting effort to meaningful causes).

PeopleIndex Emotional Intelligence Exercises

PeopleIndex is brief and validated self-assessment measure of emotional intelligence based on Daniel Goleman's EI construct. It is composed of 74 questions and measures 17 competencies organized in the areas of: 1) Self-Management; 2) Relationship Management; and 3) Communication. It has shown adequate reliability (internal consistency reliabilities .74 to .89) range from and appears to be highly correlated with established transformational leadership measures in current research. **PeopleIndex** is administered and scored online and produces a comprehensive feedback report comparing self-perceptions to an international database of over 5,000 participants in diverse job levels and organizations.

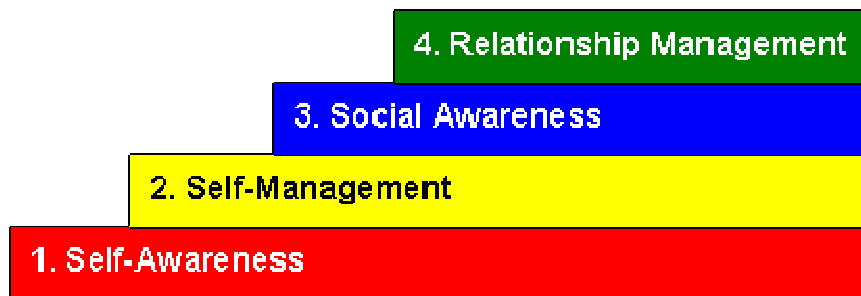
A set of self-directed exercises are included in the PeopleIndex summary report designed to enhance self-insight, self-management of emotions, cognitions and behaviors and increase interpersonal/social skills. The exercises included in the **PeopleIndex** report were selected and included based on evidence based research in the area of emotional intelligence, health and happiness. A number of researchers have argued that the ability to be happy with life is a central criterion of adaptation and positive mental health (e.g., Diener, 1984;; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 1991).

Lyubomirsky et al.'s (2005) analysis revealed that happy people gain tangible benefits in many different life domains from their positive state of mind, including larger social rewards (higher odds of marriage and lower odds of divorce, more friends, stronger social support, and richer social interactions; superior work outcomes (greater creativity, increased productivity, higher quality of work, and higher income and more activity, energy, and flow.

Additional evidence supporting the argument that subjective happiness may be integral to mental and physical health, happy people are more likely to evidence greater self-control and self-regulatory and coping abilities (e.g., Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), to have a bolstered immune system (e.g., Stone et al., 1994), and even to live a longer life (e.g., Ostir, Markides, Black, & Goodwin, 2000).

Recent research by Fordyce (1983; 1977); Seligman et al. (2005) and Lyubomirsky et al. (2005), provide strong evidence that specific psychological interventions can increase sustained individual happiness. For example, Seligman and colleagues (2005) found in a 6-group, random-assignment, placebo controlled internet study that 5 purported happiness interventions lastingly increased happiness and decreased depressive symptoms that lasted for 6 months. These studies suggest that encouraging purposeful practice of specific exercises can affect happiness and well-being in individuals.

The exercises included in the PeopleIndex report have been shown to have significant affects on health, well-being and interpersonal effectiveness in several published studies. These exercises are organized to support the development of EI in the four construct areas conceptualized by Goleman (1995) including:



Two important points need to be made with respect to this EI model that is supported by **PeopleIndex**. First, it is largely developmental: Self-awareness and self-management competencies and skills probably develop first followed by social and interpersonal skills (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). More complex business and leadership skills develop later in life when work experience is greatest. Both intrapersonal and interpersonal competence would appear to be necessary for both career and life success.

Second, the EI model above is a hierarchy of trainability, with intrapersonal skills (i.e., internalized standards of performance; able to control emotions and behavior) and interpersonal skills easier to develop (e.g., leadership, influence and self-presentation, communication). The cornerstone of change is accurate self-insight and self-awareness and the ability to regulate strong emotions that contribute to the “dark side” behaviors that reflect the impressions we make on others when we behave at our worst, such as when we are sick, stressed or overwhelmed (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005).

PeopleIndex Emotional Intelligence Exercises

1. **Self-Awareness EI Exercises:** These exercises are designed to enhance reflection, self-insight and self-awareness about an individual’s cognitions, affect and behavior (Nowack, 2009). A set of structured exercises (6) can be used to facilitate a pattern of attention to one’s own thoughts, feelings and emotions as precursors to any change efforts. Several exercises in this section require specific activity (e.g., seeking feedback from others or writing a letter expressing gratitude to someone important in his/her life). Others are purely reflective in nature (e.g., keeping a log of emotions for a week, thinking about one thing each day the individual can acknowledge gratitude about,

identifying one's "signature" strengths to leverage and practice). Each of these exercises are defined below:

- **Emotions Log:** Keep a written stress and emotions log for a week. Describe the type of stressor and corresponding emotions it elicited. Rate the level of stress (low, moderate, high), your thoughts, emotions (positive or negative) and specific actions you took to manage your emotions productively. Review your log at the end of each day and reflect upon your behavior and responses.
- **Identifying Your Signature Strengths:** List and identify your "signature" strengths, skills, knowledge and abilities (i.e., those things you have natural talent and do well). Rate each one according to your level of interest in using these signature strengths (low, moderate, high) at work or home. Note the "signature strengths" you have rated as having a "high" interest to utilize.
- **Seek Feedback:** Share your PeopleIndex feedback report with two people: 1) a supporter who values your style and strengths; and 2) a possible critic of your style. Ask both for his/her reaction to the report and what strengths and potential development areas they would say about you. Compare the reactions and feedback from both and note any similarities and/or differences. How does the feedback compare to your self-perceptions? What input and feedback can you use to improve your overall emotional intelligence?
- **Gratitude Appraisal:** Each day for a week, reflect and write down one thing you feel truly blessed about in your life and why (e.g., aspects about your health, family, work/home situation). Evaluate how gratitude impacts your overall well-being.
- **Gratitude Gift:** Identify someone in your life who has made it richer or has contributed to your development in a significant way and has not really been properly thanked or acknowledged. Write that person a short note or letter expressing what he/she has meant to you and how you value what they have done to enrich your

life. Visit the person and deliver the letter or mail it to them if this is not possible.

- **Daily Affirmation:** Each day for a week actively reflect upon and write down one thing about the day that was positive and enjoyable. What was it that made it positive? How did it make you feel?

2. **Self-Management Exercises:** These exercises are designed to enhance a purposeful translation of awareness of one's thoughts, feelings and emotions into emotionally intelligent behavior. A set of structured exercises (4) can be used to facilitate practice in managing potential self-destructive thoughts and behaviors. Each of these exercises are defined below:

- **Utilizing Your Signature Strengths:** Select one or two "signature" strengths rated high in the previous Self-Awareness exercise and that you are interested in using more (knowledge, skills, abilities, talents). For one week, attempt to use one of your "signature" strengths in a new and different way. Keep a journal to chronicle how you have used this strength and how it made you feel to employ it in work and non-work activities. Reflect on how you can continue to expand the use of your "signature strengths" on an ongoing basis for work and pleasure.
- **Life Balance Wheel:** Each week contains a total of 168 hours. Write down how many hours you actually spent doing activities such as sleeping, eating, working, fun/recreation, travel, family responsibilities, personal development, other. Now rate the quality of each category you created and spend time doing on a 1 to 10 scale where 10=Very Satisfied and 1=Very Dissatisfied. How balanced is your life? What areas are you most unsatisfied with? What specific actions can you take to facilitate increasing life satisfaction?
- **My Reactive Style:** Write down and describe how you typically behave and feel for each of these: 1) Difficult people you interact with (who are they and why are they "challenging" for you?); 2) When you are stressed (how do you typically express stress emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally?); and 3) When in conflict

with someone (what is your conflict style—competitive, collaborative, compromising, accommodative or avoidant?). For each, reflect on what you can do differently to handle the situation in a more productive manner leading to healthy emotions, reactions and outcomes.

- **Personal Development Plan:** Identify a personal or professional plan for the next 12 months that you would like to accomplish—one that you can identify that you are truly motivated and ready to begin to work on (i.e., you have a high readiness to change). Write out this plan with specific action steps and a way to evaluate progress. Make a note of this professional goal and put it in a visible place you will be able to see it each day (e.g., on your PDA, laptop, desk). Publicize and announce this plan to a colleague, friend, family member, partner, coach or mentor.

3. **Social Awareness Exercises:** These exercises are designed to enhance increasing awareness about defining one’s interpersonal, communication and leadership style, how it might be perceived by others and how it might impact other’s feelings and behavior. A set of structured exercises (4) can be used to facilitate practice in observing and tuning into the behaviors and feelings of others while monitoring one’s own interactions. Each of these exercises are defined below:

- **Engaged Listening:** Each day for a week, engage with a friend, worker, family member or co-worker to actively listen when interacting with them to increase empathy and understanding of others. Try to speak less, summarize what you have heard before expressing your thoughts and opinions, and reflect back the feelings you seem to be interpreting based on both the content of what others share with you and his/her non-verbal behaviors (e.g., use phrases such as “It seems like you are saying...” or “I’m hearing” or “I sense you are feeling...”).
- **Network Circle:** Draw a large circle and write the names of those family members, friends, co-workers, partners, significant others inside whom you would identify as your most import supporters and those closest to you (e.g.,

those who provide information, emotional support, direct assistance etc.). Next to each person's name in your circle, note how often you have actually utilized or interacted with the individual in the last month (L=low extent, M=moderate extent, H=high extent). Finally, reflect on how satisfied you were with the quality of the interaction or support they provided to you.

- **My Interpersonal Style:** Take a popular personality, interpersonal or social style assessment instrument to identify your own approach to communicating, leading, thinking, and managing relationships with others. Identify people in your life (work, family, friends) with whom you would like to improve your relationship with and using the model behind the instrument you took, identify his/her style and reflect on how you can strengthen your interactions (e.g., by understanding he/she is logical you might be able to provide an analytical and a non-emotional approach to resolve conflict and work more cooperatively).
- **Self as a Model:** Write about a recent time when you were at your best while interacting and working with others—displaying and utilizing your “signature strengths” to accomplish something of importance that left you feeling particularly satisfied, empowered and confident. Review your story each night for one week and reflect on the strengths you utilized and the feelings that came with their successful deployment.

4. **Relationship Management Exercises:** These exercises are designed to enhance specific communication and interpersonal interactions. A set of structured exercises (3) can be used to facilitate practice in developing assertiveness, feedback, conflict management. Listening and probing skills required for successful interpersonal interactions. Each of these exercises are defined below:

- **Relationship Energizers:** Make a list of people in your life that are “energy drainers” (those who are difficult, challenging, frustrating, annoying and tire you out). What is it that makes the social interactions with these individuals less pleasurable and desirable? Learn to say “no” to these individuals and reflect on plans to minimize or eliminate interactions with these individuals.

- **D-E-S-C Technique:** Identify someone meaningful at work or home whose behavior, if changed, would improve the quality of your relationship. Write out four brief sentences to provide this individual with feedback and request a specific change in behavior using the **D-E-S-C** technique: 1) **D**escribe (describe specifically and in behavioral terms what the individual is doing or not doing that is challenging for you. Focus on behaviors and not his/her personality; 2) **E**xpress how the behavior makes you feel (use and "I" statement to share the impact on your feelings); 3) **S**pecify the specific behaviors you would like the individual to make (i.e., share what the person should do more, less or differently to meet your needs or be less of a challenge to you); and 4) **C**onsequences (share the first the positive consequences that his/her changed behavior will have on you and your relationship. You might also consider negative consequences of what you will do if the behavior does not change if that would be received in a non-defensive manner and facilitate motivation to change). Rehearse these four steps out loud and initiate a meeting with the individual to utilize the **D-E-S-C** technique. If you are interrupted at any step, just go back and complete that step until you have expressed the behavior you want changed.
- **Give-Get-Merge-Go Technique:** To facilitate being experienced as involvement oriented and open to non-defensively resolving conflict with others, practice using the **Give-Get-Merge-Go Technique:** 1) **G**ive your point of view (express your idea, thought, suggestion or opinion); 2) **G**et his/her point of view (ask explicitly and directly what reactions the individual has to your ideas); 3) **M**erge your point of view and theirs by summarizing what you have heard the other person has said (don't debate, provide more rationale for your point of view or ask questions during this step); and 4) **G**o and review the areas where you agree and areas where you disagree. Either reach a closure to the conversation or ask what next steps need to be taken to move ahead in your interpersonal interaction. Identify someone meaningful at work or home and practice the **Give-Get-Merge-Go Technique**. Review and evaluate how your relationship can be improved.

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