



THE
EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE
OF THE HR
SECTOR



Overview

This paper analyzes data on individuals working in the Human Resources (HR) sector* who completed the Emotional Intelligence Profile (EIP), an online self-report questionnaire.

The results show the HR sector was somewhat higher in Emotional Intelligence (EI) than most other job sectors; in particular they scored strongly on interpersonal aspects of EI such as valuing others, empathy, and connecting with others. However, alongside this strength was a tendency for this sector to be more submissive or benevolent, have lower self-confidence, be less assertive, and over-trusting. This may impact on the HR sector's capacity for progressing to senior leadership roles that expand their strategic influence within organizations. For example, research shows that the HR sector has a strong appreciation for the benefit that EI can bring to organizations (90% of respondents) yet has had far less success at including EI within their organizations' development programmes (30% of respondents).

Since a peak in 2012, the HR sector's EI scores had dropped significantly by 2015. This is a worrying trend that may indicate lowering morale and engagement, which may be the result of substantial changes and size reduction for HR departments in later years. It may be seen as incumbent upon HR professionals to practice what they preach and to demonstrate the highest standards of EI in their own personal development. If the HR sector is to become consistently strong and less susceptible to the ups and downs of organizational change, it must not only be good at the softer interpersonal aspects, but also the harder self-management components of Emotional Intelligence.

Jo Maddocks

Chief Psychologist, Talogy

// Emotional Intelligence is the missing link that turns personality into effective performance.⁹ //



* The sample consisted of 2,196 individuals from the HR sector, their composition being; two thirds female, average age 35-45, mostly Middle to Senior Managerial level, 60% UK origin, working in both the public and private sectors. The comparison group were 24,142 individuals from various job sectors typically at Senior Manager level who completed the questionnaire between 2007 and 2015.



How emotionally intelligent is the HR sector?

In comparison with over 24,000 respondents from other job sectors Human Resources (HR) scored somewhat higher than average on Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Table 1)

As the second highest-scoring sector, they outperformed Sales, Healthcare, and Professional Services; all typically seen as people-oriented professions. This higher score may be due to the fact that the HR sector is very aware of the importance of personal development and therefore invests more time into their own self-development. Another hypothesis is that HR attracts people who are stronger in EI, as they already appreciate the value that human capital can bring to organizations.

The only group to outperform HR was the self-employed group. They tend to score higher in areas to do with self-confidence (such as **Personal Power** and **Interdependence**). This may indicate that HR could afford to be more 'single-minded' on occasions or have more courage in their convictions.

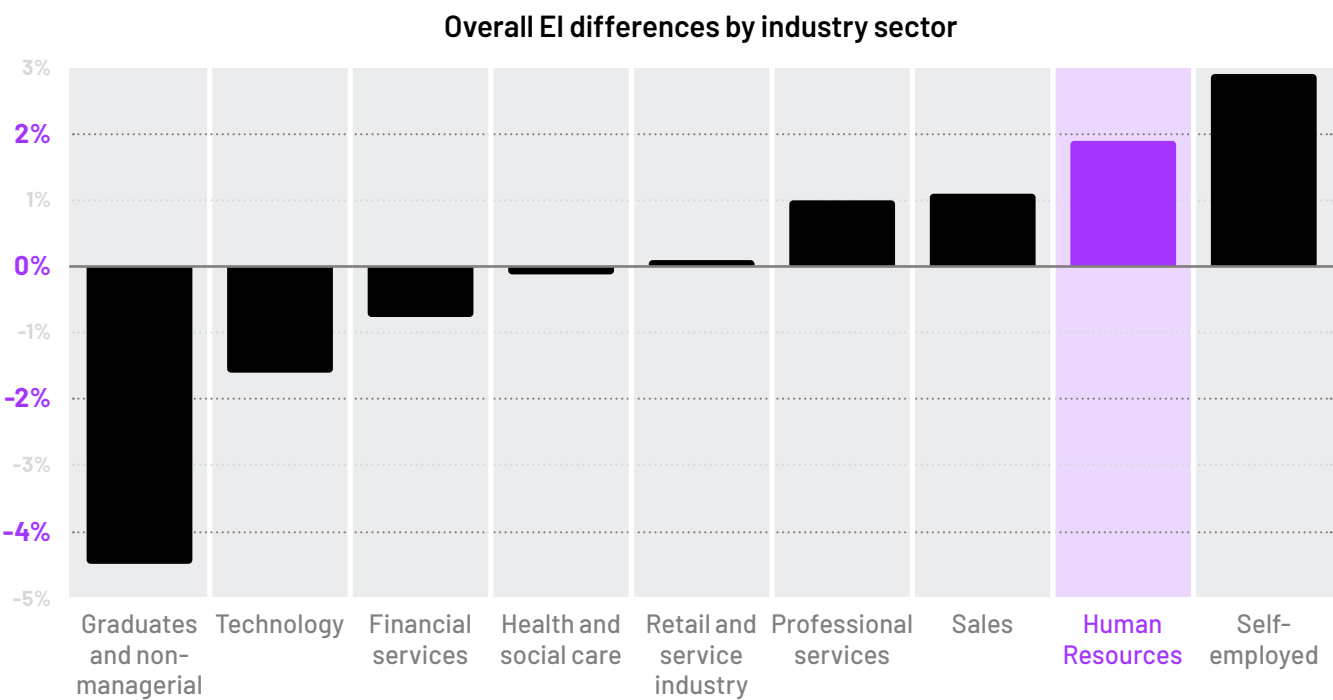


Figure 1 shows that on the six main components of EI,* the HR sector was strong on all three Interpersonal areas. In particular, they scored high on relationship scales,** such as **Regard for Others**, **Awareness of Others**, **Connecting with Others**, and **Emotional Expression and Control**. This suggests that they are good at understanding others, building strong relationships, and communicating effectively; all essential qualities in HR professionals. They also scored high in areas to do with personal development, such as **Self Awareness** and **Reflective Learning**.

TABLE 1:
Overall EI differences by industry sector
The midline represents the mean average for all job sectors

4 * An overview of EI and the EIP framework is described in Appendix 1.
** Scale definitions are given in Appendix 2.

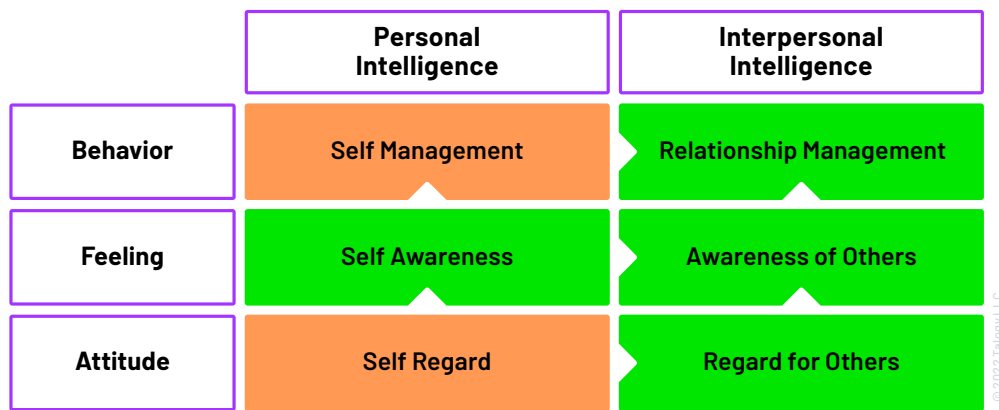


FIGURE 1:
Relative EI strengths and development areas within the HR sector
Green represents a higher score than other job sectors and amber the same score as other job sectors

Some EI scales demonstrated potential development areas, pointing towards being less self-assured, more benevolent, and tending to follow rather than lead. Specifically, these included: lower **Self Regard**, **Emotional Resilience**, and **Goal Directedness**, and more **Dependent** and **Over Trusting** compared to the general population. These results suggested the need for HR to be more **Assertive** if they are to develop their influence and impact within organizations.

The two scales that underpin all other scales are **Self Regard** and **Regard for Others**. When placed in a two-by-two matrix they represent four core attitudes or 'Life positions' that greatly influence a person's feelings, behavior, motivation, and performance. Based on this analysis the HR sector fell slightly into the top left 'Submissive' position, where **Self Regard** is lower than **Regard for Others** – shown by the blue ball (Figure 2). This suggests that, under stress, individuals may tend to become self-blaming and negative towards themselves, be less confident, and focus less on their own needs. The risk here is that the HR sector could become too subservient and lack leadership.

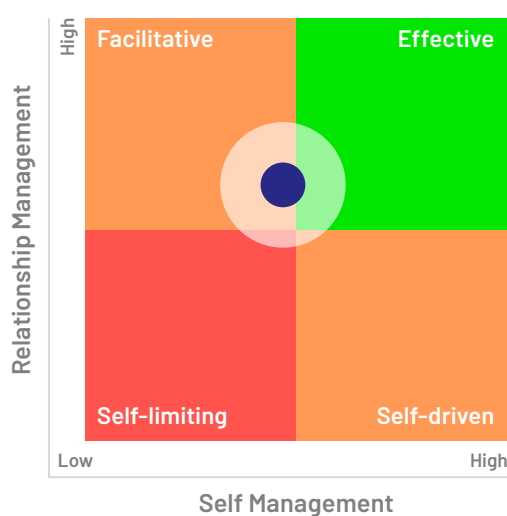


FIGURE 2:
'Core attitudes' in the HR sector
The blue ball indicates the position for the HR sector compared to other job sectors

What differences are there within the HR sector?

Further analysis was conducted to examine differences in age, gender, and job level within the HR sector

With age, there was a consistent increase in overall EI for each age band (Table 2). This may be expected as EI has close similarities with the concept of ‘wisdom’; defined as ‘the effective application of knowledge and experience’. Ideally, organizations will learn to embrace the experience of an ageing workforce, as these individuals are likely to provide sound guidance and act as role models to others. Only one scale, **Connecting with Others**, decreased with age, which may reflect less of a desire to fit in or need to be accepted. Other findings showed that there was a noticeable overall increase in EI for the 30–39 age group, which may correspond with increased responsibility both at work and in family life.

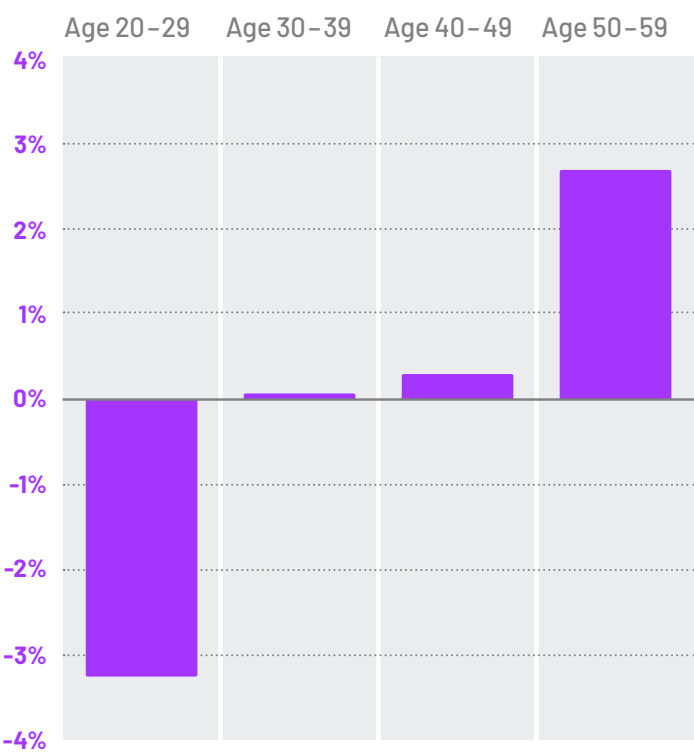


TABLE 2:
Overall EI differences
by age range within
the HR sector
The midline represents
the mean average
for the HR sector

There were some clear differences between male and female respondents (Figure 3). This may indicate that the HR sector is less appealing to males; a possible reason for this may be a perception that there is less opportunity for career development and senior management.²

The concern, therefore, is that this sector does not attract some of the typical EI strengths held by males. Males tend to score higher in areas related to self-confidence such as **Self Regard**, **Emotional Resilience**, **Flexibility**, and are more **Assertive**. Females score higher in domains such as **Self Awareness**, **Awareness of Others**, and **Connecting with Others**. Therefore, as there were three times more females than males in our sample, the HR sector presented as very strong in aspects of awareness and **Interpersonal Intelligence** with the development areas landing in the **Personal Intelligence** area.

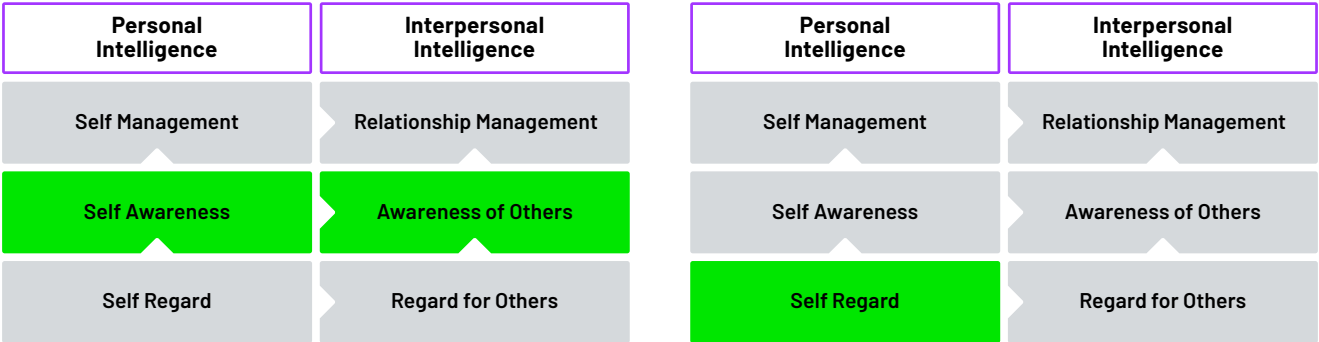


FIGURE 3:
Female (left) versus Male (right) relative
EI strengths within the HR sector
Green represents a relative strength

Overall, EI increased consistently with seniority of job level (Table 3). The difference between levels is quite considerable, indicating that HR professionals develop greatly in all aspects of EI throughout their career. A key differentiator between senior and lower levels is higher **Emotional Resilience**, indicating that dealing with set-backs and coping with adversity is an important attribute for senior HR employees. A key notable strength that becomes apparent for Directors is having higher **Self Regard**. This may indicate that operating at the most senior levels within organizations requires strong self-belief and inner-confidence. The result of this is that they are more likely to deal well with pressure, be less defensive, and be more consistent in their behavior.

It is interesting to note that in a sector related survey,³ seven out of ten HR directors previously worked in roles outside of HR. It may be that wider business experience is an important factor in helping to develop EI and self-assuredness in the organization and as part of their career progression.²

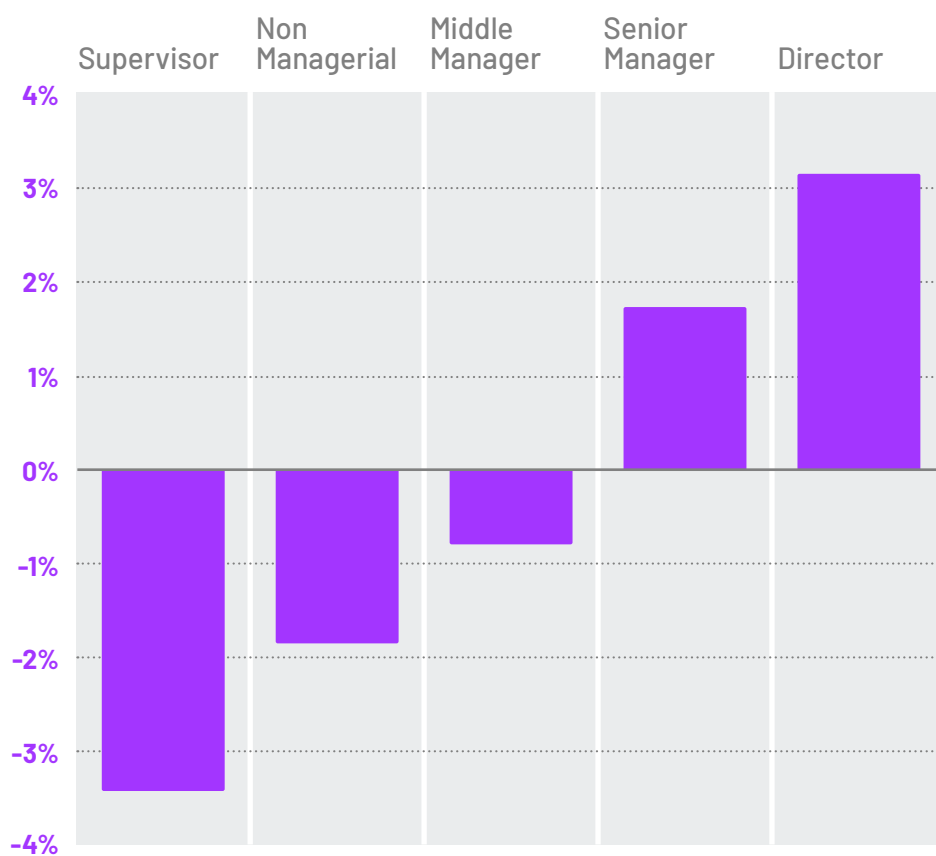


TABLE 3:
Overall EI differences
by job level within
the HR sector
 The midline represents
 the mean average
 for the HR sector



How has EI changed in the HR sector over the last decade?

Despite the HR sector scoring higher than most other job sectors in EI between 2007 and 2015, there was a rapid decline in EI after its peak in 2012, dropping below the average for all job sectors in 2015. (Table 4)

This is a worrying trend, as a drop in EI is often associated with lower morale and disengagement. This may have been due to significant changes taking place in the HR sector. For example, 50% of HR departments went through structural changes between 2013 and 2015 and 49% of the HR public sector was reduced in size.³ Inevitably, these changes will have required greater capacity to manage workload and cope with uncertainty, which will demand greater EI in areas such as **Emotional Resilience**, **Goal Directedness**, and **Personal Power**. It was also discussed that many HR functions had become more transactional as ‘Personnel’ functions, which do not require the same levels of sophistication or EI.⁴

A further explanation for lower EI and possibly lower morale is the ‘double whammy’ effect of the 2007 economic recession on HR. Not only did HR have to make redundancies but they would then have been subjected to it themselves also. The economic recession initially hit the private sector and banking industries in 2007-8, but it was a few years later when this filtered into reduced budgets and redundancies elsewhere. These were challenging times for the HR sector and has required robustness in coping with the emotional consequences, drawing upon EI attributes such as **Self Regard** and **Emotional Resilience**, being **Realistically Optimistic** and **Assertive**.

It is an indication that the state of the financial economy is closely related to the state of the human ‘emotional economy’, such that higher well-being improves productivity and that organizational success improves employee engagement.⁵

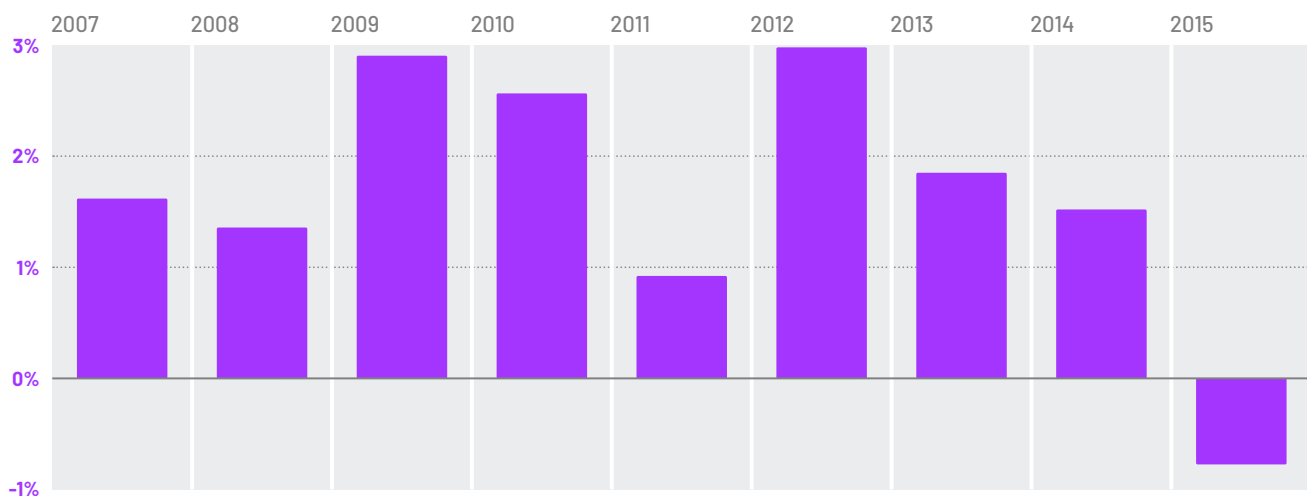


FIGURE 3:
Overall EI for years 2007-2015 for the HR sector
The midline represents the mean average for all job sectors

Are organizations making the best use of Emotional Intelligence?

In 2014 Talogy Talent Management conducted a survey of HR Managers' perceptions of EI across 50 public and private sector organizations within the UK

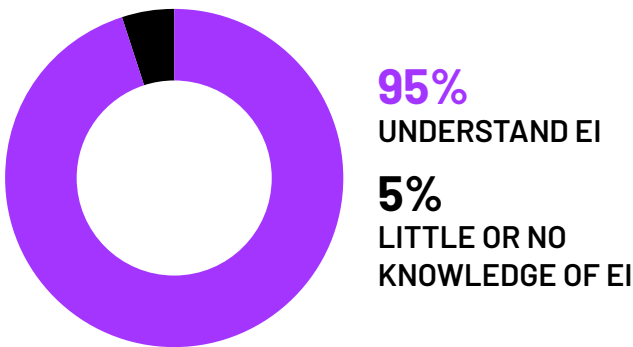


FIGURE 4:
What percentage of respondents said they know about and understand EI

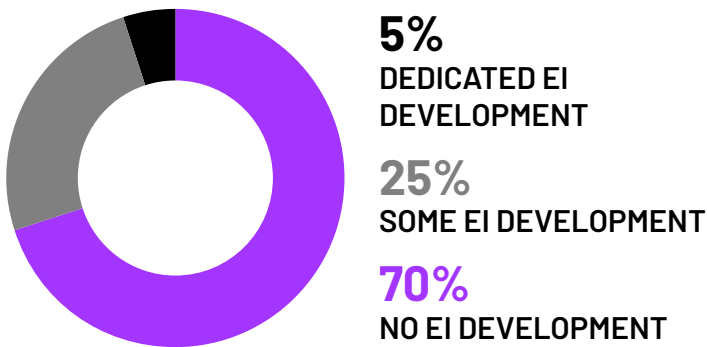


FIGURE 5:
To what extent is EI being applied within organizations?

TABLE 5:
How important is EI to organizations?
Rated as very important or crucial



These results show that about 90% of respondents see EI as very important or crucial to individual and organizational performance (Table 5). Yet, only 30% of these organizations are including EI within their development processes (Figure 5).

It may be inferred from these and other findings in this survey that:

- Senior management do not fully recognise the value of EI
- HR does not have sufficient influence to implement EI
- EI development is not given adequate priority in these organizations.

There is wider evidence to support the case for increased application of EI in organizations. The HR CIPD Outlook survey³ found that the top rated priorities for HR functions with about a quarter of respondents were:

1. Employee engagement
2. Managing change
3. Managing performance
4. Leadership development

Each of these criteria have been shown to correlate with higher EI.⁶ Research by Talogy Talent Management found that the emotional climate created by the leaders of an organization accounts for a 22% variance in the performance, engagement, and well-being of its employees.⁷ 'Leadership development' for example, requires several EI attributes such as: **Awareness of Others** and **Connecting with Others** to be of influence, being **Assertive** and having **Personal Power** for courageous leadership, and **Authenticity** to build trust, loyalty, and credibility.

As well as implementing EI within the organization, HR professionals would benefit greatly from developing their own EI leadership in the areas previously identified. Evidence has shown that higher levels of individual EI in HR professionals translates into more effective leadership.⁸



APPENDIX 1

What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a combination of attitudes and behaviors that distinguish outstanding performance from average performance. Individuals with higher EI will be better able to manage themselves and their relationships to be both personally and interpersonally effective. The framework shown below provides an organizing structure for the different facets of EI and how they are related. The two main streams of EI are:

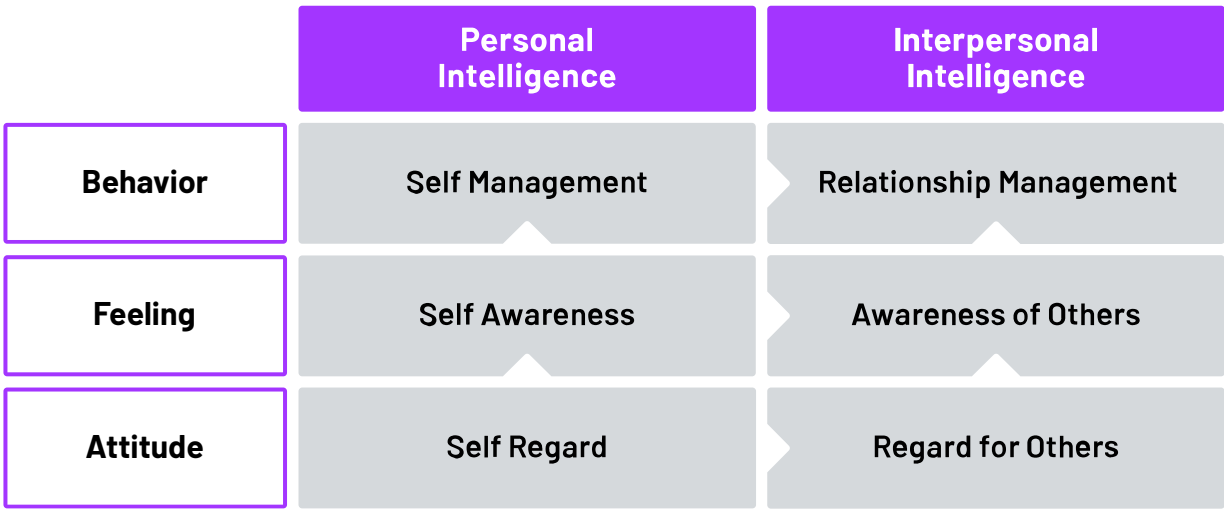
Personal Intelligence

Being effective at picking up what is going on inside of you (Self Awareness) and taking appropriate actions to manage yourself (Self Management).

Interpersonal Intelligence

Being effective in picking up what is going on for other people (Awareness of Others) and taking appropriate action to manage them (Relationship Management).

Your Emotional Intelligence is influenced by your attitudes. In particular, your attitude towards yourself (Self Regard) and your attitude towards other people (Regard for Others). To make developmental changes stick, it is important to develop the right attitudes along with your behaviors. The relationship between the various parts of Emotional Intelligence is shown in the diagram below.



© 2022 Talogy LLC

The EI framework
For a comprehensive description of EI and its development refer to **Emotional Intelligence at Work**.⁹

APPENDIX 2

Scale definitions for the EIP

Attitude

1 Self Regard

The degree to which you accept and value yourself.

2 Regard for Others

The degree to which you accept and value others as people, as distinct from liking or approving of what they may do.

Feeling

3 Self Awareness

The degree to which you are in touch with your physiology, feelings, and intuitions.

4 Awareness of Others

The degree to which you are in touch with the feelings of others.

Self Management

5 Emotional Resilience

The degree to which you are able to pick yourself up and bounce back when things go badly for you.

6 Personal Power

The degree to which you believe that you are in charge of and take sole responsibility for your outcomes.

7 Goal Directedness

The degree to which you relate your behavior to long-term goals.

8 Flexibility

The degree to which you feel free to adapt your thinking and your behavior to changing situations.

9 Connecting with Others

The extent and ease with which you are able to make significant connections with other people.

10 Authenticity

The degree to which you invite the trust of others by being principled, reliable, consistent, and known.

Relationship Management

11 Trust

Your tendency to trust others.

Mistrusting

Carefully Trusting

Over Trusting

12 Balanced Outlook

How well you manage to balance optimism with realism.

Pessimistic

Realistically Optimistic

Over Optimistic

13 Emotional Expression and Control

The degree to which you are emotionally controlled.

Under Controlled

Free and in Charge

Over Controlled

14 Conflict Handling

How well you handle conflict.

Passive

Assertive

Aggressive

15 Interdependence

How well you manage to balance taking yourself and taking others into account.

Dependent

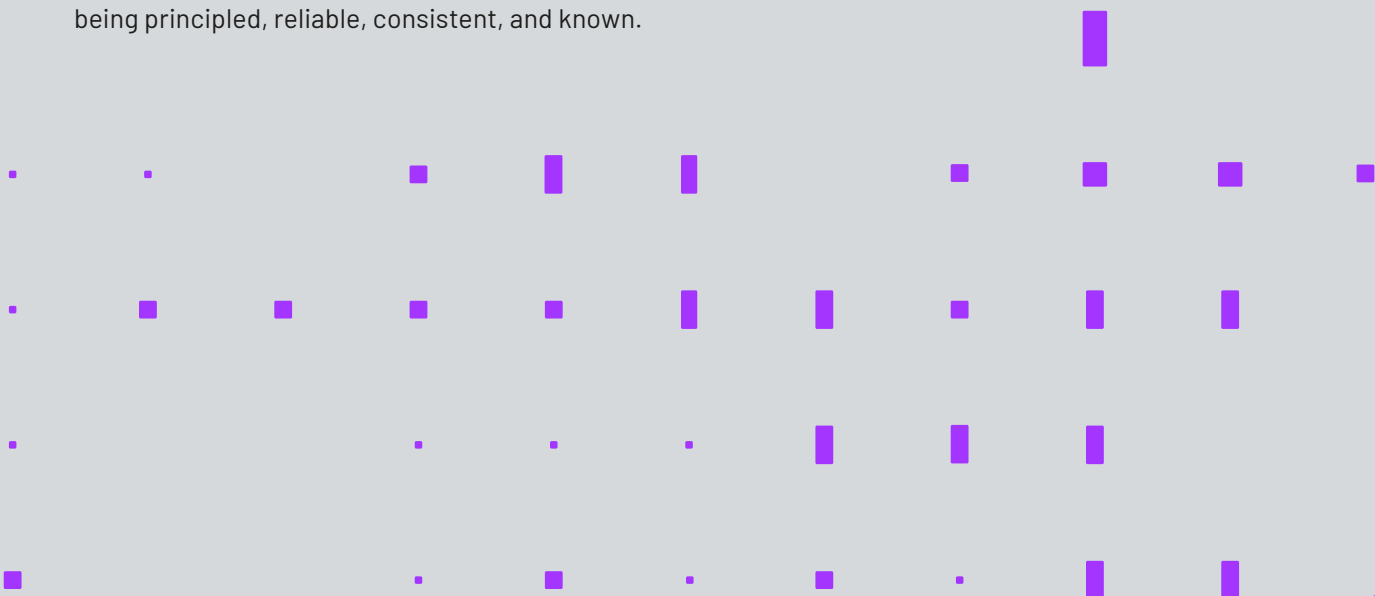
Interdependent

Over Independent

Developing your Emotional Intelligence

16 Reflective Learning

The degree to which you enhance your Emotional Intelligence by reflecting on what you and others feel, think, and do.



References

- 1 Ernst, F.H., Jr. (1971). The OK corral: The grid for get-on-with. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 1(4), 33-42.
- 2 Murphy, N. (2014). Choosing HR as your career. Barriers to career advancement, HR careers, XpertHR Survey.
- 3 Miller, J. (2015). Views of Our Profession. CIPD, HR Outlook. Winter 2014-15.
- 4 Roberts, H. (2014). HR must leave 'comfort zone' of transactional work, says Atos HRD. Retrieved from: HRmagazine.co.uk. (Accessed on 16-05-14).
- 5 Gallup Inc. (2010). Employee engagement. What's your engagement ratio? Gallup Inc. Performance Optimisation.
- 6 O'Boyle, E., Humphrey, R., Pollack, J., Hawyer, T., and Story, P. (2011). The relation between emotional intelligence and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32, 788-818.
- 7 Maddocks, J. (2014). What impact does leadership climate have on individual performance, engagement and well-being? Talogy website publication (reprints available from Talogy Talent Management, UK).
- 8 Alston, A., Dastoor, B., and Sosa-Fey, J. (2010). Emotional Intelligence and Leadership: A study of human resource management. *International Journal of Business and Public Administration*, 7(2).
- 9 Maddocks, J. (2018). Emotional Intelligence at Work – How to make change stick. Cheltenham: Spa House Publishing.

