

Emotional intelligence, part 1

What it is and why it could be useful to you



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MUCH OF THE WORK of a purchasing professional involves negotiation. In the public sector, contracts tend more to be awarded through competition rather than just through a process of negotiation. Nevertheless, negotiation skills remain important, particularly with respect to the settlement of contract related disputes. Disputes can often become highly emotional. The ability to work around emotion-based problems is, therefore, a great asset for a negotiator. In recent years, interest in this area has swept government, business and the educational field. An entire discipline of emotional intelligence (EI) training has emerged, that claims to offer the ability to bolster career success and enhance business and other relationships.

This is the first of two articles explaining why a training program in emotional intelligence development can strengthen the performance of the staff of a public purchasing department. In this article, we will explore the meaning of emotional intelligence. In our next article, we will discuss the specific items that should be covered in a training program, to maximize the chance of successfully employing EI techniques in improving purchasing operations.

The term "emotional intelligence" describes the measure of a person's ability to feel, use, communicate, recognize, remember, learn from, manage and understand the emotions of others. Academic writing with respect to EI can be traced back to the 1920s, but most of the work in this area dates from the mid-1980s. Because the field is so new, much of the thinking in the area remains unsettled. Some psychologists argue that a person's emotional quotient (EQ) can matter more to an individual's chance of success in life than his or her IQ. Many studies have established that there is no strong correlation between the IQ and success in life. Although popular opinion is that IQ predicts success, there is little evidence that it does so consistently. It has been suggested that EQ is the other critical factor in linking overall intelligence with success. However, while this is possible, there is little concrete evidence of such a linkage. One reason is that there is still no accepted method for the measurement of EQ. Although a test was developed in 1997 to assess emotional intelligence, this work remains controversial.

Researchers differ as to whether it is possible for a person to raise their EI. The most recent writings conclude that EI (an individual's capacity to perceive and understand emotions) is stable, but that the extent of an individual's *emotional knowledge and understanding* can be increased fairly easily. For instance, it is possible to increase an individual's level of perception by training that individual to observe. A person who receives such training may not increase their ability to see on an emotional level, but at least that individual knows what to look out for. It is also possible to train an individual with respect to constructive responses to particular emotional situations (including the apparent emotions of others).

Indeed, such training takes place over the course of a lifetime. Human emotions are innate, and so to an extent every individual has some ability to understand the emotions of others. Scientific studies confirm that infants quickly acquire emotional sensitivity, emotional memory, and the ability to process emotion-related information

pertaining to those around them. As a child matures, it learns from experience what responses are appropriate for each emotion that it experiences or witnesses in others. The extent of a given individual's ability to control their own response to emotion, and to respond effectively to the emotions of those with whom they are dealing (or who are likely to be affected by their actions), represents a person's emotional intelligence. The goal of EI training is to maximize our ability to make practical use of these techniques learned so early in life.

Much of the most popular writing on the subject of EI has attempted to draw a link between the development of emotional understanding and the enhancement of business and other relationships. Generally, these works argue that a person's prospects of success can be enhanced through the development of specific areas of emotional competence:

- The ability to identify and name emotional states and to understand the link between emotions, thought and action;
- The capacity to manage emotional states – that is to control emotions so as to shift from a less desirable emotional state to a state more suitable to the prospect of success;
- Sensitivity to (i.e. the capacity to read) the emotions of others;
- Development of the ability to influence other people's emotions by appropriate response; and
- The ability to enter and sustain satisfactory interpersonal relationships.

It follows from the foregoing that EI entails both personal control and (to some extent) the manipulation of relationships with others. Conscious control over emotions allows a person to bend his or her thinking in a direction that will generate a better decision or more positive outcome. Being emotionally intelligent does not entail sensitivity to others in the sense of being friendly or supportive. It involves the careful processing and use of the emotional information displayed. *mm*

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