

# Different Concepts of Emotional Intelligence

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## **Abstract**

*This article reviews the literature on emotional intelligence after charting the theory's development. It talks about the various ideas and viewpoints on emotion and cognition, as well as how the theory of emotional intelligence came to be. Additionally, it covers the three main models of emotional intelligence, their contributions to the theory, and a brief discussion of how the theory might be improved in the future.*

**Keywords:** *Emotional Intelligence; Literature Review*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

A definition of emotion in a dictionary will describe it as a state of feeling involving thoughts, physiological changes, and an outward expression or behavior but, theologians, psychologists, philosophers, scientists and researchers have developed and are still bringing in various theories which attempt to fathom its bottomless expanse of intrigue and fascination. While theologians study emotions or rather control of emotions as means of realizing the Supreme Being, the psychologists and sociologists have discussed emotions against their significance to the individual and society. On the other hand, the natural scientists like physiologists are interested in the origin, evolution and functions of emotions. Human beings are a complex species of emotion and reason. While reasoning enables them to judge things with mathematical precision, emotions help them to understand and empathize which make them “human”. Traditionally it was believed and accepted that people with high reasoning skills and a sound logical bend of mind were more intelligent. Erasmus of Rotterdam, a sixteenth century humanist proclaimed:

“Jupiter has bestowed far more passion than reason – you could calculate the ratio as 24 to one. He set up two raging tyrants in opposition to Reason’s solitary power: anger and lust. How far can reason prevail against the combined forces of these two, the common life of man makes quite clear.” (as cited by Goleman, 1995).

There was a shift of focus from emotions being considered as disruptive to where it was considered as assisting cognition. The positive relationship between emotions and cognition was established by the “cognitive theorists” who supposed that emotions depended on personal interpretation or appraisal of a particular event. Any event or an occurrence has a personal meaning for every person and the person reacts depending on this personal meaning and his evaluation of the event based on his personal well-being. Others like Stanley, Schachter and Jerome Singer proposed that emotion involved both physiological arousal and the cognitive appraisal of this arousal. Even when people experienced a state of „nonspecific physiological arousal“ like anger, happiness or others, they tried to evaluate and reason it to figure out what those arousals meant for them (Dursun et. al., 2010). As the author further surmises, some theorists explained the process of emotion as first identifying the objects or events, second appraisal, third physiological changes, fourth action or expression and finally regulation. First comes the appraisal and then the emotion and thus there is no question of emotion disrupting cognition. Researchers had moved from the phase where they believed that emotions are disruptive, to a phase where they saw that emotion and reason are interconnected and that most of the times, cognition or reasoning precedes emotions. Intelligence and emotion which were considered as separate fields now integrated in the new field “Cognition and affect” (Mayer, 2001). The perspectives about emotions keep varying. The subjective nature of emotions makes it difficult to bring in a single accepted definition or theory. To scientifically conceptualize something that can only be felt and experienced becomes an almost impossible task. Different theories on emotions have attempted to understand the nature of emotions and how they are experienced by people. While the James-Lange theory believes that a particular event or an occurrence causes a physiological change and then this change is interpreted into a corresponding emotion, the Cannon-Bard theory believes that we perceive the physiological change and the emotion at the same time. The theories and concepts are innumerable. Emotion maybe “... a complex, diffuse concept that can be expressed differently at different levels of abstraction” (Mathews et. al., 2004), nevertheless, the beauty and appeal lays in the fact that each of these concepts hold a place of significance for themselves and have also revolutionized the way people

perceived emotions. No longer seen as only troublesome, it was being realized that emotions played a pivotal role in cognition and motivation.

### **EMOTION OR FEELING**

The biologist Charles Birch (1995) said that “Feelings are what matter the most in life”. Whether it matters the „most“ is contentious, but it certainly is essential. The terms „feelings“ and „emotions“ are generally used interchangeably, and as Wierzbicka (1999) observes certain languages (French, German, Russian) do not have an equivalent term for the English word „emotion“. But, there are certain crucial differences between „feelings“ and „emotions“. A „feeling“ can be a physical sensation which is experienced, „like a flushed face, or a knot in our stomach or a general feeling of unease“ that could be due to an emotion. (Caruso, 2008). One can speak about a “feeling of hunger” and not an “emotion of hunger”. When asked to list a few emotions, one would say – happiness, sadness, guilt etc. So, are “feelings” more appropriate to bodily or physical responses and “emotions” to thought? In that case what does the individual mean when he/she expresses a “feeling of loneliness”? Is that related to thought or a physical experience? It seems more appropriate to accept that „The English word „emotion“ combines in its meaning a reference to „feeling“, a reference to „thinking“ and a reference to “human body” (Wierzbicka, 1999). Thus, when we use the word „emotions“, we combine the qualities of all the three – feeling, thinking and physical experience. Many psychologists also prefer the word “emotion” over “feeling” because somehow “emotion” appears more objective than “feeling” (Wierzbicka, 1999), and it is easier to scientifically, logically analyze something that is objective than that which is subjective. If “intelligence” is thinking and rationalizing, and emotions combine the quality of thinking along with feeling, then can it be surmised that emotions too can be analyzed and assessed like any other intelligence? This is the premise of the theory of emotional intelligence which emphasizes on the importance of emotional regulation and emotional management in an individual’s life. The following segment traces the evolution of the theory.

### **THE EVOLUTION OF THE THEORY OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Intelligence per se was always connected with only intellect and cognition. It was believed that there was only one „intelligence“ called g for general intelligence. A person was born with a certain intelligence which could be assessed by using short answer tests (IQ tests). Psychologists also believed that this intelligence was difficult to change. But, can intelligence be only reasoning and cognitive abilities? Gardner (1998) makes a compelling point when he questions – were the IQ tests in this world to disappear, will it be impossible to identify a person as intelligent or otherwise? Such questions have led us to a new world of understanding which has agreed that apart from the intellectual prowess, there are other inherent abilities in an individual which should also be taken into consideration before assessing his/her intelligence. While tracing the evolution of the emotional intelligence theory, one finds that attention to „non-intellective“ elements being equally important was brought in as early as 1920 by Thorndike. This was followed by David Wechsler in 1940, who opined that, “The main question is whether non-intellective, that is affective and conative abilities, are admissible as factors of general intelligence. (My contention) has been that such factors are not only admissible but necessary.

As Gardner further discusses in the same paper, a person’s intellect or non-intellect cannot be sealed by a single intelligence test as every human being in his/ her own way has multiple latent abilities. These abilities were not acknowledged by the conventional methods of testing. Based on this belief, he defined intelligence as “a psychobiological potential to process information so as to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in at least one cultural context”. By 1983, armed with a thorough research in psychology, anthropology, cultural studies and the biological sciences, he proposed in his book “Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences”, seven intelligences – linguistic, logical, musical, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal – which every human being possessed, maybe in varying degrees. In 1995, an eighth intelligence – „naturalist“ – was added. The Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory makes two major claims;

- all human beings have all these intelligences
- no two individuals have exactly the same combination of these intelligences

Even before Gardner or Weschler, the traditional belief that intelligence pertains to cognitive abilities such as memory and problem solving (Cherniss, 2000) was challenged upon as early as the 1920’s when Thorndike spoke about “Social Intelligence”– “an ability to understand men and women, boys and girls – to act wisely in human relations” (as cited by Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Thorndike moved away from the traditional concepts of intelligence in believing that it is not only a person’s reasoning and logical prowess but also his ability to recognize his own and others’ intentions and motives and act accordingly that is important. He classified intelligence into three facets based on a person’s ability to understand and manage

- ideas (abstract intelligence),
- concrete objects (mechanical intelligence), and
- People (social intelligence) (Kihlstrom and Cantor, 2000).

Though the concept of social intelligence paved way to theories which insisted on recognizing other latent skills in a person, in itself it was not successful or convincing. It definitely changed the way people perceived intelligence, but failed to distinguish itself as a distinct form of intelligence. As Cronbach (1960) declared, “fifty years of intermittent investigation ... social intelligence remains undefined and unmeasured.” Thorndike himself acknowledged the fact “whether there is any unitary trait corresponding to social intelligence remains to be demonstrated.” (as cited by Salovey and Mayer, 1990). This inability to distinguish social intelligence as a distinct intellectual entity, led to a declining interest in this theory but, fortunately research was revived with Guilford’s “Structure of Intellect model” in 1967. The general public also acknowledged the significance of social intelligence. When asked by Sternberg and his colleagues (1981) to list the qualities which they (the laymen) considered essential in an intelligent person, traits like making fair judgments, sensitive to others’ needs, displaying interest in the world at large, admitting mistakes, etc. were listed out (Kihlstrom and Cantor, 2000). Fascinated and intrigued by these findings, Peter Salovey a professor of psychology from Yale University and John Mayer also a professor of psychology from the University of Hampshire, took the research further and introduced the concept of “Emotional Intelligence” (EI). They presented it as a subset of social intelligence (Salovey and Mayer, 1990) and defined EI as an – “ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one’s thinking and action”. They went ahead distinguishing EI from other types of intelligences and presented a framework, a set of skills they believed that helped people in regulating emotions – in one’s own self and others. They also believed that emotions can be intellectually analyzed and realized which eventually led to the development of what is now known as the „ability model” – the only one to date. The other models are the mixed ability models that were conceptualized later by Bar-On, Goleman, et al. which included certain personality traits as well. Mayer and Salovey’s four branch model understands emotional intelligence as a cognitive ability and presents the four levels through which a person becomes emotionally intelligent.

- Emotional Perception
- Emotional Assimilation
- Emotional Understanding and
- Emotional Management

The first step emotional perception is an ability to be self-aware of emotions and to express them accurately. When a person is aware of the emotions he is experiencing, he moves on to the next level – emotional assimilation, which is to distinguish between the different emotions he is undergoing and also identify those emotions that affect his thought process. This ability leads him to – emotional understanding – an ability to understand complex emotions and also to recognize the transition from one emotion to another. By then he becomes adept in dealing with his emotions and thus is able to manage his emotions by connecting to or disconnecting from any emotion at any given situation. This gives him complete control over his impulses and is thus able to think, analyze and behave rationally in any situation. The entire process is purely an intellectual procedure. Emotions are understood and controlled through intellectual prowess. In contrast, Reuven Bar-On and Goleman propose the mixed ability models which include certain personality traits as well. Bar-On’s (2002) model of emotional intelligence relates to the potential for performance and success, rather than performance or success itself, and is considered process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. It strives to identify in a person the latent capability of being emotionally intelligent. His model outlines the following five components –

- Intrapersonal
- Interpersonal
- Adaptability
- Stress management and
- General mood components (Bar-On, 2002)

They are similar to Mayer and Salovey’s model on emotional self awareness, self control, self expression, and empathy, but along with these aspects, Bar-On includes reality testing, - the ability to assess the relation between the emotionally experienced and the actual nature of an object, stress tolerance, and the strength to stay happy and optimistic in the face of adversity. Goleman’s model deviates slightly as he includes organizational awareness, leadership, teamwork and collaboration along with self awareness, self control and empathy, as his focus is on workplace success.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw the pendulum swing towards recognizing the positive role of emotions in a person’s life. This was in response to the extravagant credit accrued on intellect which had led to a “lack of self understanding and impoverished shallow social relationships” (Mathews et. al. 2004). A person who had academic acclaim was envied, but at the same time was looked upon with derision. He was becoming the butt of ridicule with even television programs caricaturing him as a „nerd” who lacked even the basic social skills and was never in tune with reality (Zeidner and Mathews, 2000). A growing number of people were looking at prospects of discounting the excessive importance attached to intellect and gain a platform for other skills which were equally important but hitherto sidelined. „Emotional Intelligence” comes at this juncture and

the immense success of the theory is in part because of the novelty of the concept but, the popularity of the theory is also an off spring of an antipathy towards the undue importance attached to IQ tests. More importantly, the instant popularity of this concept is also a testimony to the fact that people are looking out for ways of strengthening and regulating their emotional life.

### **THE ABILITY MODEL**

When Mayer and Salovey introduced the concept of EI in 1990, they defined it as “an ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.” They believed that any task is loaded with information, „affective information“ and understanding and regulating it would help individuals „to solve problems and regulate behavior“ (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). They conceptualized a set of skills which they believed would assist a person in regulating his emotions. They identified three broad skills – „appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion and utilization of emotion- which were further classified as:

**I. Appraisal and regulation of emotion:** in self (verbal and non-verbal perception) and others (non-verbal perception and empathy) – a person who is able to accurately perceive his emotions will also be able to respond to his emotions accurately, and in turn will be better in expressing them to others. At the same time, he should be able to understand the emotions in others as well. This allows him to adapt to the situation and have better social skills. These skills are a part of emotional intelligence as it requires the processing of emotional information in oneself and in others.

**II. Regulation of emotion:** in self and others – emotions can be triggered and regulated according to a person’s will, when he is adept at consciously perceiving those factors which have a feel good effect and those which do not. This ability also sharpens his senses towards perceiving the emotions of others and effectively adapting himself or influencing others as the situation demands. As the authors themselves acknowledge, this can sometimes have a negative bearing as people may try to manipulate others to meet their own demands – good or bad.

**III. Utilization of emotions:** flexible planning, creative thinking, redirected attention and motivation – this ability is included in the construct because, people with emotional intelligence should be at an advantage in solving problems adaptively ( Salovey and Mayer, 1990). An awareness of his emotional state helps him plan his actions, think creatively, redirect his focus and motivate himself to get the best out of any situation. The initial conceptualization focused on perceiving and regulating emotions. As the authors felt that this was incomplete without „thinking“ about emotions, they redefined the theory as “Emotional Intelligence is the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Based on this definition, a four branch model was proposed – the four branches moving from basic psychological processes to more complex ones. They also believe that an emotionally intelligent person had the ability to progress through these four levels and master most of them faster than others with lower EI. The four branches each were further subdivided into four sets of skills.

**a) Perception, Appraisal and Expression of Emotion:** This is an ability to identify emotions in oneself, in others, express them accurately and further discriminate between honest and dishonest expressions of feelings.

**b) Emotional Facilitation of Thinking:** This sharpens the thought process as emotions direct attention towards important information and the emotions can be used to classify the information for better judgment and memory. Emotionality helps people to have multiple perspectives. A happy mood leads to optimistic views and a bad mood to pessimistic thoughts. An awareness of these mood swings assists a person in approaching a problem in specific ways with better reasoning and creativity.

**c) Understanding and Analysing emotions:** It is based on employing emotional knowledge: to identify the subtle relationships and differences between similar emotions – eg. Loving and liking, and also interpret the meanings of those emotions. The person also has the ability to identify complex emotions occurring simultaneously (love and hate, fear and surprise, etc.) and also perceive the transition from one emotion to another (when anger turns to satisfaction or anger leading to shame).

**d) Reflective Regulation of Emotions to Promote Emotional and Intellectual Growth:** It is an ability to be open to emotions good or bad and thus having the power to voluntarily attach or detach from an emotion. The person also has the competence to reflect on his own and others’ emotions and thus be able to manage emotions in himself and others.

## II. CONCLUSION

The theory of emotional intelligence promises to predict and improve the life skills of individuals. The proponents of the theory believe that in understanding, analyzing and managing emotions in themselves and others, lies the key to an improved quality of life. As the operationalisation of the theory is the crucial factor which validates their claim, the first and foremost challenge that faces the theorists is to design an instrument or improve upon existing measures which will accurately evaluate and assess the emotional skills of an individual. This will also set to rest the other fundamental question whether emotional intelligence is a distinct form of intelligence or simply old wine in new bottle. Another challenge that faces the theory is that there are too many definitions and approaches which is though vital and a healthy sign for any new theory, many a time it leads to confusion among researchers as to which definition or approach has to be taken. This has also lead people to accuse the concept as mere hype and ignoring and trashing the theory as non-existent.

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