

Emotional intelligence

Once we become more observant of our thought patterns and habits, we can get much quicker at seeing the pattern getting into gear, and simply by becoming aware of it, it may just dissolve. Our bodies are the best tool for catching patterns in their early stages, as we found in earlier exercises.

We might for example, be in a meeting and observe a tightening feeling in the stomach; where this once might have been the pre-cursor to defensive behaviour, we can now pause and employ our ample brains in figuring out what's actually going on in the room. Something uncomfortable is happening and we've just got an early warning of its approach. Now we can be more rational and intelligent in our response.

With practice and mindful presence, we may also pick up on the discomfort of *others*. So with sensitivity to our own emotional patterns, and insight into other people's feelings, we can be far more tuned-in, choose appropriate actions, and become more effective.

Gaining mastery over our reactions and emotions, according to Daniel Goleman (author of Emotional Intelligence) requires that we have to take responsibility and make informed choices about our actions, based on an 'adaptable and creative frame of mind'. Key to the approach is the recognition that we have choice; we don't need to be limited by our old 'self model'.

Emotional intelligence has been described as 'the ability to monitor one's own and other people's emotions, to discriminate between different emotions and label them appropriately and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour'. This is recognised a key skill and an indicator of workplace leadership ability.

This skill can be broken down further, as follows:

- *Perceiving and understanding emotions* – becoming more skillful at detecting and defining emotions in oneself and others, and becoming more and more sensitive to slight variations
- *Managing and using emotions* – accepting and working *with* our emotions to help with problem solving; recognising that emotions give us *useful information*; and harnessing the ability to *regulate emotions* in ourselves and others.

Exercise – Sensitive interactions

Work with a friend or close colleague at first. Initiate a conversation about a work or other issue where you know you have some disagreement. Both of you should be briefed with the introduction as above, and commit to be mindfully present to your own emotions arising, and sensitive to the reactions of the other person.

After a few minutes, stop and hold an honest review of what was going on at the emotional level. Ask yourselves these questions:

- 1. At what point did you start to register emotional discomfort, such as annoyance, or sensing insult or criticism?*
- 2. How did you know this was arising?*
- 3. What would your normal reaction have been?*
- 4. What would be a better, more honest and fearless action?*
- 5. Did the other person recognise that this was happening?*
- 6. At what point did you become aware of the other person's discomfort? Check with your colleague to see if you were correct in this.*

Practice this at every opportunity when interacting with others, and in particular when there is some likelihood of discomfort.

At some point take a risk, and in the middle of a meeting, say how a particular aspect of the interaction is making you feel. This kind of honesty can be incredibly liberating for all parties as it gives everyone permission to be more honest.