

Leadership Barometer 127 Situational EQ

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Emotional Intelligence (also called EQ) is your ability to understand emotions and your skill at using that insight to manage yourself and your relations with other people. A high EQ is a prerequisite for good leadership because Emotional Intelligence governs the ability to work well with people.

Many people view EQ as a static quantity within each person, similar to IQ. In reality, EQ is a dynamic quantity that changes and grows as we gain life experiences.

EQ is Never Static

I participated in an online discussion while teaching a graduate course several years ago that highlighted the dynamic aspects of EQ. I was asking students to rate their current level of EQ.

One person got back that he was strong in EQ, but because of his military background, that skill was not as developed as it might have been.

He believes EQ is less important in the military because of the command and control nature of the service. People expect to be ordered around and do not take umbrage at the drill sergeant for yelling. That same behavior in the corporate world would cause instant revolt.

EQ is Situational

EQ is really situational; it morphs depending on the current circumstances and prevailing culture. That is actually good news because it means we have some control over our level of EQ and are not stuck with our current level forever.

Real Examples

Suppose a man who had spent most of his adult life as a mediator for contract negotiations in the corporate world decided to change and become a Jesuit priest. Would his perspective on the emotions of other people change with that transformation? In Rochester, New York, Rev. Edward Salmon made that exact conversion.

Salmon admits that in many ways running a local Catholic High School is similar to corporate work, but the whole framework of challenging the youth to be all they can be takes a much deeper skill of listening and sensitivity.

As we go through life, our skill at using Emotional Intelligence becomes developed and changes with each new situation. For example, the EQ skills required to convince an ornery teenager to do his homework are not the same as those required to coach a 99-year-old blind man to remain optimistic when confined to a nursing home.

Some of the psychological thoughts would be similar, and the values might be roughly the same, like following the Golden Rule, but the emotional framework in the two environments is vastly different. A different set of tools is required to succeed in each of these situations.

Cultural Differences

I suspect the skill of EQ and how to apply it would be different in unique cultures around the world. For example, one's behaviors toward other people in England might be totally different than that person would show if he or she was brought up in Japan. The cultural differences would drive unique opportunities and challenges.

Gender Differences

We know that there is a big difference between how men and women experience Emotional Intelligence. In "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus," John Gray describes the gender paradigm differences that cause men and women to deal with emotions in totally different ways.

For example, women will consult with other women to analyze and resolve problems, while men would rather retreat to their "cave" to deal with difficulties.

It is widely believed that the Corpus Callosum in the female brain is larger than the same organ in a male.

The Corpus Callosum is the "highway" in the brain that connects the right side (limbic, or emotional system) to the left side (rational brain). That allows women to process emotions into logical thought much faster and easier than men.

Conclusion

Your background, skill set, and even gender, along with the environment you experience will determine how you employ Emotional Intelligence in a way that is unique to you. That application of EQ will morph as you go through life in ways that nobody else on the planet can experience.

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