

## Leadership Barometer 151 Assessments Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD



When you get involved with the topic of Emotional Intelligence it usually begins with a self-assessment. I have done this many times, and I always have a strange feeling while doing it for several reasons.

### Reasons for feeling strange

1. What I am really doing is reacting to a bunch of questions created by researchers. They ask me to respond to a set of standard scenarios with some kind of "typical reaction for me." The problem is that these scenarios are never set up the exact way I have been exposed to them. I am simply guessing what I would do. I have no idea, and my reactions would be highly situation dependent.
2. Daniel Goleman pointed out that people who have low Emotional Intelligence often have the most significant blind spots. The phenomenon we are attempting to assess has a significant component that varies with the level we are trying to measure. I may believe my Emotional Intelligence is generally high, but others may not see it. There is a kind of Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle involved here. The simple act of trying to measure the situation actually impacts the phenomenon we are trying to measure.
3. Emotional Intelligence has to do with how I react to stimuli. Do I have the skill of considering my response from the left side of my brain before I react? I am not a good judge of how efficient my neural responses really are. My responses are automatic and often I do not consciously control them.
4. There is a fair amount of gaming involved in the assessment. I believe I know how a person *should* react under a certain set of conditions. I may be tempted to answer based on what I think the "right" answer is.

### Problems with other assessments

I have the same problem with taking personality tests like the DiSC Assessment or the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. What these evaluations measure is how *I perceive* my own preferences as opposed to objectively

how I show up in the world. There may be a gap between these two sets of information. The gap may be wide, particularly if my own behaviors are inconsistent.

### **Paired comparisons**

The personality indicators do have an advantage because they simply ask me to choose which I prefer given a paired comparison. That is easier to do than to try to predict how I will react emotionally to a stimulus.

On the flip side, I know what is going on within myself better than other people do. They can only infer by my behaviors how I am reacting to various things.

I shouldn't try to pinpoint my EI skills without a full understanding of how I translate the external stimuli into behaviors. There are obvious clues, but there is a big missing piece: whether I ***believe my actions are justified***.

### **An example**

There was a critical moment near the end of a basketball game between Syracuse and Duke. The referee made a call that the Syracuse coach, Jim Boeheim, called "the worst call of the season." The score was 58-60 in favor of Duke with only 10 seconds left in the ballgame. A basket by Syracuse player C.J. Fair was waived-off for what the referee called a charging violation.

Boeheim obviously did not agree with the call. He totally lost his wits and charged the ref yelling over and over that the call was "Bullsh\*#". He stuck his finger right between the eyes of the ref. [video clip of the call and Boeheim's reaction to it.](#)

As a seasoned coach, Jim was well aware of the consequences of his actions before he did them. SU got a technical foul, and Boeheim was ejected from the game. Duke went on to win the game easily.

Even though Boeheim knew the consequences, he was unable to control his rage and reacted in a way that was not at all helpful to his objectives. That shows low EI, right? Not so fast.

### **Hijack behavior**

This is a prime example of "hijack behavior," where the emotional reaction simply overpowers the ability to perform logic. Does this mean Boeheim has low Emotional Intelligence? I think not, and if you had him do a self-evaluation of his EI, he would probably score pretty high. In that instance, in

front of thousands of witnesses, he displayed amazingly low EI. Reason: ***In his mind the reaction was justified.*** That was based on the importance of the game, the nature of the call, and all of the other emotions within him.

If his reaction was not justified to him, he would not have done it. If there was a better course of action, he would have done that. Instead, he threw away any chance to win and looked like a raving idiot to thousands of fans.

### **Problematic practice**

My point is that doing self-evaluations on psychologic topics is problematical. It may be helpful for some kinds of insight, but the accuracy of the result may be suspect for the reasons given above.

If you would say "I am an ENFP," you would be stretching the point. Rather you should say, "according to my opinion of myself at the moment, my best MBTI match is ENFP." That is a far more accurate statement than the first one.

### **Conclusion**

I say, "I measure high in Emotional Intelligence." If that assessment was done by me, we should discount the statement. A far more accurate phrase might be, "I did the survey and it showed me to be high in Emotional Intelligence. I need to beware that I am not blind to the reality of the situation."

Do not misunderstand; I believe there is good value and insight in doing a self Emotional Intelligence Survey. I just caution that the accuracy of the information may be questionable. Take the test and learn what you can, then observe your own behaviors based on what you have learned.

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