

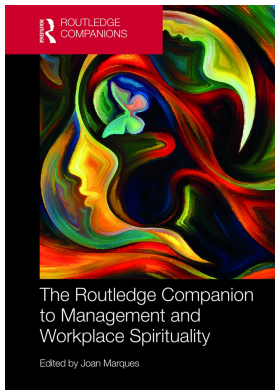
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## **The Routledge Companion to Management and Workplace Spirituality**

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### **Emotional Intelligence and Work**

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## 15

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE  
AND WORK*Isaac Wanasika***Emotional Intelligence**

There are many definitions and applications of emotional intelligence (EI), some controversial and others even conflicting. This is, in part, due to widespread use of the concept without empirical support across multiple disciplines. It is widely acknowledged, however, that EI involves aspects of emotions and intelligence. Popular writers and practitioners have often been tempted to prescribe EI as a panacea to organizational ills such as interpersonal conflicts, organizational stress, and burnout. Some of these prescriptions can be supported empirically, while others are questionable. Regardless, the appeal of touting the positive effects of EI is quite high among practitioners and scholars.

The first step is to understand the interaction of emotions and intelligence. Interest in different attributes of EI has continued to evolve over the past 100 years. Early work on EI appears to have focused on social intelligence. Over time, however, EI has evolved to include four categories: perception, assimilation, understanding, and management. Emotional perception is the ability to be aware of your own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Ability seems to infer accurate perception of these emotions. The concept of intelligence is associated with the cognitive capacity to think in abstract terms, learn new knowledge, and adapt to new environments. Intelligence has many dimensions such as memory, critical thinking, abstraction, and judgment. General intelligence is often measured by the “G-factor” (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Some studies have found support for intelligence as a genetic disposition. According to this line of thinking, intelligence is a trait you either have or do not have. This view has been completely debunked in recent studies (Nisbett et al., 2012). In the most recent findings, intelligence is determined by multiple factors. Many disciplines such as psychology, neuroscience, computer science, intelligence science, and others have made significant progress in understanding intelligence. This has created further complications in trying to understand how these factors are related. Perhaps the most important finding is how little we know about intelligence.

Emotions are intense feelings that are produced by, or related to, a specific cause or event. Emotions govern and signal a response to the specific event or situation. Emotions include intense feelings such as happiness, sadness, excitement, and anger. Emotions are often distinguished from moods. Moods tend to be long term in nature, often positive or negative, and are

not necessarily elicited by a specific event or incident. A large body of work has explored emotions. Like intelligence, understanding emotions is work in progress with many unanswered questions. From an EI standpoint, the main interest is in understanding individual emotions and emotions of others, and identifying methods of selectively controlling these emotions. Emotions, however, are often not isolated. In some situations, emotions are intermingled such as in anger and sadness or jealousy and rage.

Mainstream research on EI acknowledges that EI involves a wide range of emotions and abilities that are relevant at the workplace. Generally, EI specifies how people recognize their own emotions, how they recognize the emotions of others, and how they regulate their own emotions in order to achieve desirable outcomes. From this description, there are many formulations of EI. The lack of agreement by scholars and practitioners regarding EI's attributes, measurement, and utility has not deterred assertions regarding its benefits. This may be, in part, because EI deals with a very active interaction between intelligence and the visible parts of human emotions that constantly pop up through personal and social interactions. EI can be defined as the ability to use emotions for the growth of the whole individual. This involves accurately perceiving one's own emotions, accurately perceiving emotions of others, and accurately understanding how individual behavior affects emotions of others (Mayer et al., 2004). This perspective of EI seems to conceive EI as a form of ability or competence. Such a formulation might have other important implications for understanding EI and the extent to which EI competence plans can be developed for workers.

Recent studies have formulated EI as a personality trait (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). In this model, EI is described as a set of behavioral dispositions and self-perceptions concerning one's ability to recognize, process, and utilize emotional-laden information (Petrides & Furnham, 2003, p. 278). This perspective of EI has identified four main dimensions. The first dimension is individual or worker wellbeing. Wellbeing encompasses happiness, self-confidence, and optimism. The second dimension is sociability. Sociability incorporates assertiveness, social competence, and emotional management of others. The third dimension is self-control. Self-control includes emotion regulation, stress management, and low impulsiveness. The last dimension is emotionality which includes empathy, emotion expression, and emotion perception of self and others (Santos, Mustafa & Gwi, 2015); Petrides et al., 2007). There are obvious differences and controversies between the trait and ability approaches. Some of these differences are theoretical, while others are related to how EI is measured. From a practical standpoint, it has been easier to scientifically measure traits than ability, since ability cannot be easily quantified unless an individual self-reports or is tested on a relevant task. Measuring traits, however, appears to diminish the importance of other determinants of EI that are not trait-determined. In addition, it creates a burden of creating EI developmental plans for workers if in the first instance the concept has indeed been cast as a trait.

A third group of EI paradigms seeks to combine the first two models of traits and ability. These mixed models are mainly practical-oriented with the intention of developing EI competences among individuals in business education and management consultancy areas. The Bar-On Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence (Bar-On, 2006), a popular EI model is a framework of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills, and facilitators. This EI framework influences one's ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, relate with others, adapt to change, solve problems of a personal and interpersonal nature, and efficiently cope with daily demands, challenges, and pressures. The dimensions of this model are: intrapersonal (comprising self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, and self-actualization); interpersonal (comprising empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationship); stress management (comprising stress tolerance and impulse control); adaptability (comprising reality

testing, flexibility, and problem solving); and general mood (comprising optimism and happiness). These emotional-social intelligence competencies can be taught to individuals in a wide variety of contexts (Bar-On, 2006). A second popular example of mixed approaches is Goleman's Emotional Competence Inventory (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000; Goleman, 1998). In order to understand this perspective of EI, it should be noted that it was developed as a competence model. The competence inventory has certain key ingredients that relate to other models (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). The first dimension is emotional self-awareness. This competence includes identification of emotion and understanding how emotions are related to one's goal, thoughts, behaviors, and accomplishments (Goleman, 1998). The second competence is the ability to regulate one's emotions. This competence involves intentionally eliciting and sustaining pleasant and unpleasant emotions when considered appropriate, effectively channeling negative affect, and restraining negative emotional outbursts and impulses (Goleman, 1998). One can only regulate one's own emotions, and the emotions of others, if one understands those emotions first. The third component is social awareness of emotions and empathy, which includes awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns, understanding and sympathizing with others' emotions, and responding to others' unspoken feelings (Goleman, 1998). Note the introduction of feelings in addition to emotions. Feelings implies other sensory tendencies such as feelings of suspicion or "funny feelings" that may extend to extra-sensory perceptions outside the realm of emotions. Next, is regulating emotions of others. This competence incorporates influencing others, effectively communicating with others, and managing conflicts (Weisinger, 1998). Motivational tendencies include such components as internal strivings, attributions, and need for achievement (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Goleman, 1998). The final dimension is character, which incorporates trust and integrity (Goleman, 1998; Weisinger, 1998). The Goleman's Emotional Competence Inventory is highly popular and widely used. Despite numerous criticisms among scholars, these mixed methods are alive and well among consultants and practitioners.

### *The Importance of EI at the Workplace*

Our knowledge of EI is limited, yet we cannot ignore its importance at the workplace. In the past few decades, studies and anecdotal evidence have consistently demonstrated positive effects of leveraging EI at work. Empirical studies have shown that EI is beneficial in enhancing organizational performance, individual productivity, and wellbeing in the areas of customer satisfaction, goal alignment, motivation, leadership, organizational teams, interpersonal relationships, interpersonal communications, organizational citizenship behavior, corporate culture, dealing with toxic employees, managing a hostile environment, management of stress, and burnout. The extensive benefits have perhaps led others to inappropriately prescribe EI solutions and interventions even where there is no evidentiary proof of effectiveness or relatedness with the problem. While the academic war on EI rages on, the concept continues to flourish. The popularity of EI can be, in part, attributed to practitioner-interest in the mid-1990s following the publication of the runaway bestseller by Daniel Goleman (Goleman, 1995) and subsequent interest in mainstream media. The following year *TIME* magazine wrote extensively on the subject and even had a cover titled, "What's your IQ?" In the cover, it goes on to say, "It's not even a number. But emotional intelligence may be the best predictor of success in life, redefining what it means to be smart" (Gibbs, 1995). Even at this early stage, Gibbs, the *TIME* magazine author, was writing on potential misuse of the concept. A quick google search for EI yielded more than 196 million hits, while more than 1.6 million books related to the subject have been published. Clearly, despite the issues, EI continues to enjoy wide appeal.

### ***EI and the Changing Workplace***

Since the theory of EI was developed, the modern workplace, and the concept of work as perceived by employees and employers, has evolved. Due to technological advancements, work processes have become less mechanically digitized and spatial, resulting in a change in workflow processes and the way employees interact with each other. Workers are more likely to interact through some form of technology. Virtual organizations, flextime, and other work-related changes have reduced face time among workers in many industries. While these developments might diminish the role of EI at the workplace, they may also have potentially led to more isolation among some workers or even reduced emotional awareness.

The work environment itself has gone through a transformation. For a variety of reasons, many organizations can no longer guarantee lifetime or longtime employment. Temporary work, contingency work, and fixed term contractual employment have become the norm rather than the exception. The psychological contract between employers and workers has been diminished in many industries. Workers have to endure overwhelming gales of globalization and competitive pressure that is constantly looming over organizations. Workers can be forgiven for being conflicted about whether to invest emotional and social capital in a workplace that is temporary by many measures, or focus on personal wellbeing and employability.

Third, effects of globalization have led to increasingly diverse organizational populations. The ability to monitor and understand the emotions of co-workers is an important ingredient in job satisfaction and reduced conflicts at the workplace. However, a diverse workforce presents special EI and cultural intelligence challenges. Culture seems to have effects on most aspects of EI, and the ability to monitor and understand co-workers' emotions becomes increasingly challenging in a multicultural work environment. Workers realize they must effectively engage with other workers who may not share their worldview or may have different values and beliefs. In order to develop cultural competences that increase cultural intelligence, it is essential to first understand how culture affects EI.

### ***EI and National Culture***

Culture can be defined as the collective programming of the mind distinguishing one group or category of people from others (Hofstede, 2009). A nation develops a distinct culture that is unique and different. It has long been known that culture has considerable effects on emotions. Different cultures understand and interpret emotions differently. Different cultures have idiosyncratic emotional display rules that may, at times, be difficult to discern or even confusing to outsiders. Perceptions and judgments regarding emotions also vary on the basis of cultural orientation. Culture is central in determining our beliefs, values, and norms. These attributes have a major influence on the way individuals make sense of the world, life, and how they are likely to understand and control their own emotions. An individual with high EI in one culture may be considered to have a low EI in a different culture. Culture has a great effect on where people look, what they see, how they perceive what they see, and their interpretation and enactment of these perceptions through verbal and non-verbal language. Culture also determines emotional display rules. Individuals will display emotions that are culturally proper, in the most appropriate form. This implies that a person from a different culture with high EI is likely to display the wrong emotions, or none at all, even if they have a high degree of emotional understanding and control. This has led researchers to explore other forms of intelligence that are related to culture. Consequently, cultural intelligence is a different concept from EI. Cultural intelligence is concerned with a person's ability to adapt effectively to new cultures and contexts

(Earley & Ang, 2003). Some determinants of EI and cultural intelligence are related, since both perspectives deal with some form of inherited or acquired intelligence.

To understand how different cultural backgrounds might affect EI at the workplace, we need to first examine different national cultural dimensions. Geert Hofstede has conducted an extensive study spanning more than four decades of national cultural dimensions and how values at the workplace are influenced by culture (Hofstede, 1984). National cultural dimensions can be described as independent preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other. Hofstede's study identified six distinct national cultural dimensions. These are power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence. Some of the dimensions have more relevance to EI than others.

In individualistic cultures, the needs, interests, and feelings of the individual are the focal point. In such cultures, individuals are focused on taking care of their individual interests and those of their immediate families. Individuals are more likely to recognize their own emotions and express those emotions more openly. Since individuals are focused on their own emotions, they may be less likely to pay attention to the emotions of others. In collectivist societies, individuals are more focused on the needs of the collective, a tight-knit group with shared interests. Individuals are more likely to put the needs of this in-group over and above their own interests. In collectivist societies, individuals are more likely to suppress their personal emotions, and focus more on collective feelings of the group.

Other cultural dimensions such as high context versus low context, and power distance relationships are likely to impact how emotions are managed and interpreted by others. For example, emotional cues used by people from one culture to ascertain another person's emotional state such as empathy may differ from those used in other cultures (Earley & Peterson, 2004). A "friendly" smile for a Canadian may seem straightforward until she encounters a Thai worker for whom over 20 separate smiles provide subtle cues for radically different frames of mind (Klausner, 1993).

### ***EI and Emotional Labor***

Emotional labor is the process of controlling and managing one's emotions and expressions to reflect the organization's desired emotional expressions. Emotional labor has been associated with dramaturgy theory (Goffman, 1949). According to this theory, human beings act out their lives by guiding and controlling the way others perceive and see them. Human beings act differently when they are in the presence of other people from when they are on their own. Goffman proposes human beings have a "front stage" where they act out or engage in impression management in order to portray a specific image to their "audience." On the other hand, the backstage is where the individual is alone and emotions on display are genuine. The paradigm is very similar to Shakespeare's "all the world's a stage" monolog. Going back to organizations and work, organizations often set rules and norms outlining how workers should interact with internal and external customers. For example, a hotel receptionist may be expected to demonstrate hospitality by smiling and making small talk with guests that are checking in. Physicians and nurses might be expected to show a bedside demeanor that reflects empathy and compassion to their patients. Organizations require workers to apply these emotional display rules even though they might have different off-stage emotions at the same time. For instance, the hotel receptionist that is required to smile and display warm feelings might be mourning the loss of his dog.

When employees' display rules are in conflict with their authentic emotions and feelings, they are compelled to suppress their authentic feeling, leading to self-censorial emotional

dissonance (Santos et al., 2015). Emotional dissonance is a psychological state that can lead to deleterious effects of emotional labor. Emotional labor can be intense when surface acting is required. Surface acting involves displaying organizationally sanctioned emotions, while trying to suppress real emotions. Over time, surface acting may lead to unsustainable emotional dissonance and, ultimately, burnout. Burnout is a state of emotional exhaustion that creates a feeling of being emotionally drained, helpless, and fatigued from work. Emotional burnout has three main components, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Workers that burnout from emotional labor tend to lose the sense of caring about co-workers and customers, in the process acting in ways that are inconsistent with organizational display rules. Lack of intervention to relieve burnout can lead to more serious physical illness and even death.

A heightened sense of EI can alleviate or reduce the effects of emotional burnout at work. Deep acting implies that rather than engaging in surface acting, a worker endeavors to modify or transform internal feelings in order to align them with required display rules. It is expected that individuals with a high EI will be attuned to their own emotions in terms self-awareness, control, and empathy, as well as accurately communicating correct emotional cues. For such workers rather than faking their feelings, they will identify and portray positive aspects of the job. Since organizational rules tend to focus on suppressing negative emotions, individuals that are high in EI have the ability, and motivation, to focus on positive emotions, rather than negative emotions, as a means of sustaining their wellbeing. Given the significance of the service industry in the economy, increased incidences of mental illnesses at the workplace and an incentive to make work more meaningful and fun, this aspect of EI holds a lot of promise. More needs to be done, however, to fully understand physiological and psychological processes in play in order to effectively deploy such interventions.

### ***EI Competence***

Can EI competences be improved through training? There are many EI institutional and executive training programs. The exact psychological basis and processes for EI, however, have not been mapped. Consequently, most EI training content lacks theory and method justification. In addition, there is no agreement on the constitution of EI dimensions. While it may not be possible to overhaul individual EI competences, there are clear benefits in training for awareness of what is known, and evidence for incremental work-related benefits. In the most recent meta-analysis on the efficacy of EI training, most studies found that training involving ability EI models showed significantly higher efficacy than training involving trait and mixed EI models. Training effects of understanding emotions was more effective than training effects of facilitating thought (Hodzic, Scharfen, Ripoll, Holling, & Zenasni, 2018). It seems the verdict on training so far is clear; it is easier to enhance ability than traits. In addition, while EI has been associated with better organizational performance, most training modules seem to be focused on individual interventions such as mental health, interpersonal conflicts, and individual wellbeing. There is increased research on the efficacy of EI in resolving mental and other behavioral issues. While this is a welcome development, there is a potential danger of casting individuals with low emotional intelligence as diagnostic cases worthy of medical intervention. EI has been developed as part of cultural intelligence competence training. Cultural intelligence (CQ) captures this capability for adaptation across cultures and it reflects a person's capability to gather, interpret, and act upon these radically different cues to function effectively across cultural settings or in a multicultural situation (Earley & Ang, 2003). In a nutshell, cultural intelligence involves aspects of EI with a cultural context.

## ***EI and the Changing Technology***

Internal work environments continue to change, often in unpredictable ways. Technology and globalization have transformed how people communicate and with whom they communicate in organizations. Such developments call for a new way of perceiving co-workers' emotions, establishing meaningful relationships, working building teams, and communicating effectively. New forms of technology such as robotics and artificial intelligence are continuing to support, and even replace, workers rendering EI insignificant in such situations. Knowledge-mediate work processes in the modern organization appear to substitute, or even neutralize, the effects of EI.

### ***The Dark Side of EI***

Despite extensive interest, little has been done to understand the negative aspects of EI. Emotions and intelligence have no sense of morality per se. Whether EI is crafted as a trait or ability, there is potential for nefarious use. Individuals with EI can easily manipulate others as they pursue their own interests. History has shown that manipulative and Machiavellian leaders in the past had a deep understanding of their followers' emotions, fears, and weaknesses. Studies have attempted to link EI to positive and benign attributes such as empathy and good-natured behavior (Petrides, Vernon, Schermer, & Veselka, 2011). Since EI is not grounded in any value framework, it would be naïve to assume that all individuals with a heightened sense of EI are well intentioned. Manipulative individuals, narcissists, sociopaths, and con artists tend to pick their victims carefully after assessing their vulnerabilities. This skill or ability certainly entails the same elements of understanding other people's emotions, feelings, and weaknesses that EI defines.

### ***Criticisms and Controversies of EI***

Some controversies and issues related to EI have been discussed in different contexts. One pointed criticism by Locke (2005) is worth highlighting. Locke submits that EI is an invalid concept for a variety of reasons. First, the ability to monitor one's emotions does not require any special degree or type of intelligence. This is a factor of field of focus. People do learn to discriminate between emotions. A highly intelligent person is able to make subtle distinctions between similar emotions such as jealousy and envy, and use developed introspective skill to focus these distinctions inward. Locke suggests that whether one uses one's knowledge in everyday action is not an issue of intelligence per se. Other factors such as rationality, focus, and integrity are relevant. Redefining intelligence broadly to include multiple intelligences destroys the notion of true intelligence or the g-factor by making it seem that everyone has equal intellectual capacity. In addition, while some people are more intelligent, it may not be reflected in every skill that they choose to develop. Finally, Locke observes that EI proponents have developed a long list of characteristics that includes everything, but actual intelligence (Locke, 2005). Locke is one among many critics that have stepped forward, but their criticisms have not deterred proponents of EI to march on. The most pointed criticism appears to be in the way intelligence is described in the body of knowledge and demonstrating how this description is different from EI.

### ***The Way Forward for EI***

The emerging concept of work and the current organizational workplace are constantly changing in alignment with the fourth industrial revolution. EI is even more relevant and offers the promise of resolving many modern work-related issues such as job insecurity, misaligned



psychological contracts, diverse workforce, and virtual organizations. The EI concept, however, must be nurtured in a number of ways. There is still lack of agreement on what constitutes EI, its dimensions, and measurement. A systematic empirical analysis of EI, its antecedents, and measurements is necessary. Such a body of knowledge will benefit those practitioners that are interested in enhancing EI awareness and training among their ranks.

EI is not a panacea for all work-related employee problems. The excitement and enthusiasm around EI has led some to perceive EI as a universal solution to many workplace social and psychological problems, without understanding its limitations. Perhaps more robust, empirical foundations will help to moderate this enthusiasm while making EI more effective. EI scholars and practitioners have a great opportunity to explore the impact of EI on modern work-related contexts such as digitization, multicultural work settings, globalization, and constant uncertainty affecting modern organizations.

Wong and Law (2002) have found that workers with high EI are capable of revising perceptions regarding their work environments. These workers regulate their emotions by intensifying, diminishing, prolonging, or curtailing certain emotions. Such employees are able to feel and behave appropriately in different work settings. For instance, a supervisor that works with a difficult boss will strive to curtail feelings of frustration while dealing with the boss by deliberately curtailing those emotions. On the other hand, the supervisor will portray upbeat feelings of energy and optimism while interacting with her subordinates. Workers with high EI are able to understand their own emotions, the emotions of others, and regulate their own emotions appropriately according to the situation. Workers with high EI are also able to achieve individual emotional growth and maturity over time since they have relevant emotional “tools” to cope and learn from different situations. They have a greater capacity to make adjustments in dynamic environments such as new leadership, new employees, and unpredictable performance outcomes in the organization.

There is a clear need to create a better understanding of what EI means, and separate the concept from other related concepts such as intelligence, introspection, and reflection. The romanticized view of EI as a solution to employee and organizational problems is unrealistic. Like many other psychological constructs, the effect of EI interventions on individual workers is modest though positive. However, the effect on organizational performance is indirect, through improved worker wellbeing and mental state of health. There are emerging organizational contexts and work situations that had not been contemplated when the concept was first developed. Clearly, there is more research to be done in all these areas.

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