

## THE LATEST DISCOVERIES ON EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE HABITS

Since TalentSmartEQ released the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal in 2003, much has happened in the fields of emotions and emotional intelligence. The appraisal has allowed millions of people to get a snapshot of their emotional intelligence and a roadmap to EQ development, which provided what many other emotional intelligence assessments cannot—both the what and the how of EQ. Learning what doesn't come naturally or what may sit in your blind spots can be easier when paired with a personalized development plan of strategies to get you started; it is the spoon full of sugar to help the EQ medicine go down. And what we have found over two decades is that the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal has become a vehicle that enables people to translate their new EQ knowledge into better decision-making, improved leadership and teamwork, stronger relationships—at and outside of work—and at scale, healthier and more successful organizations.

We have learned from you, our readers, and the thousands of people we have worked with, that there is interest in the latest emotional intelligence trends. This section includes EQ trends from some of our current research and EQ research from around the world.

*To access our previous findings, to stay up to date with EQ research, and to glean insights on related topics, please visit our website at [talentsmarteq.com/eqtrends](https://talentsmarteq.com/eqtrends).*

### Future of Work: Emotionally-Centric Jobs

In the early 2000s, emotional intelligence was just finding its footing in research and public domains. In the decades since, emotional intelligence has become a mainstay on “Top Skills” lists needed for the future of work. A Harvard Business Review study looking at 5,000 job descriptions from 2000-20017 show C-suite openings have increasingly emphasized the importance of social and emotional skills and deemphasized operational expertise. What we have seen over the last several decades is that the world of work is constantly shifting, driven by growth, VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity),

digital transformation—including AI and other significant disruptive technological forces—and an increasing interest in inclusion, equity, and well-being. These and other changes are usually accompanied by emotions, making it essential that we equip people with the social and emotional skills necessary to be successful, both as we navigate the changes and as the new forms of work take shape. The Future of Jobs Report put out by the World Economic Forum lists emotional intelligence skills as two of the eight skills groups forecasted to be important by over 90% of organizations represented in the study.

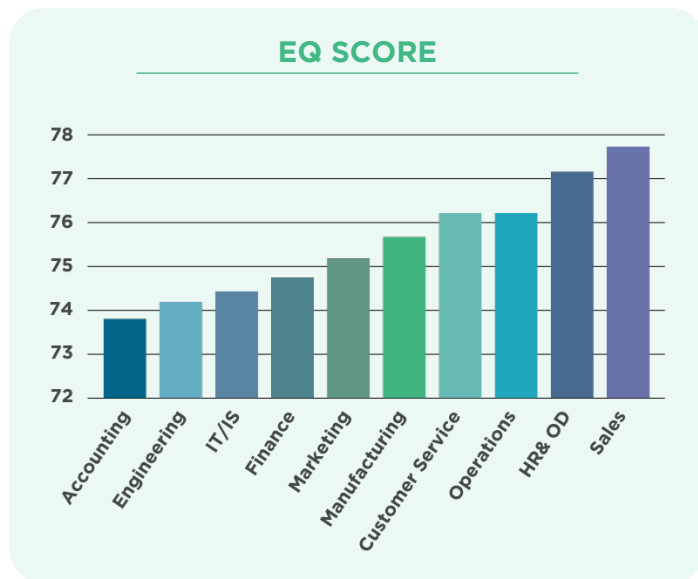
As more people and organizations begin grappling with the impact of automation, AI and other technologies' impact on the future of work, it could be argued that rather than trying to compete with technology, we should lean in to doing the things that only humans can do. As Kevin Roose put it, “when we try to do our jobs, we should be trying to do them as humanly as possible.” And a large part of that, is emotional intelligence. What machines can't do—our distinct human advantage—is the ability to be human with ourselves and others. Consider what many working parents learned about the value of school and in particular, teachers, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers are responsible for materials development, lesson design, test construction, grading—all things that could potentially be automated by technology. However, so much of what makes a great teacher is the ability to be human with our children. Teachers read a child's energy and mood and can sense when something is off with a student. Good teachers listen deeply and help students navigate situations with their own feelings and other children. They ask important questions. The best teachers guide students in discovering what they are great at and managing things that don't come as naturally.

As organizations, industries, and professions continue to shift and evolve with the changing landscape of the world of work, it will be important to think differently about how emotions and emotional intelligence can serve us and potentially, help us solve some of our society's biggest challenges.

### Is EQ More Essential in Certain Professions?

Data from the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal database looked at the effect of profession on emotional

intelligence. Results of a one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in emotional intelligence,  $F(1, 109,800) = 468.86, p < 0.001$ , and explained the greatest amount of variation across all other demographic variables, including gender, age, and job level.



Differences in EQ scores between individuals in manufacturing, marketing, customer service, and operations were insignificant. Accounting, engineering, IT/IS, and finance were insignificantly different from one another but statistically lower than the rest of the job functions. HR&OD and sales positions were highest in EQ and statistically different from the others. However, there may be a difference between statistically significant and practically significant. Consider that between these 10 professions the means range from 73.9 to 77.7, a gap of 3.8 points. In fact, anyone taking the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal will see in their report that a score of 70-79 is labeled, “With a little improvement, [emotional intelligence] could be a strength.”

Some researchers have suggested that emotional intelligence is less significant, if not harmful even, in work where emotions are less vital. Adam Grant, in his book *Think Again*, doubles down on this notion by writing, “if you are fixing my car or doing my taxes, I’d rather you didn’t pay too much attention to my emotions.” The argument that individuals in technical roles shouldn’t necessarily have high EQ or put energy into the skill suggests in some way that possessing high EQ would make them less capable in their functional tasks. Grant is clearly misunderstanding how one uses emotional

intelligence as a tool. Having high EQ doesn’t mean emotions are overprioritized, it means they are considered as part of the overall decision-making process and managed appropriately for the most effective solution in the moment. If you are my mechanic, at the time you are fixing my car, I would want you to prioritize the technical skills to do so efficiently and effectively. But when you are coordinating your schedule to get my car into the shop and weighing options about what is essential versus what is “nice to have,” I would absolutely like my feelings considered relative to the inconveniences of being without my vehicle and my final bill.

We know emotional intelligence is a skill that can be learned. Some professions, like HR and others, provide ample opportunities for people to develop and hone their skills. Other roles, like accounting, engineering, and IT may not have as many opportunities to practice EQ skills and potentially, performance metrics may not be as directly connected. Organizations might consider the potential ramifications of this assumption. As organizations have become larger, more complicated, and more matrixed over the last several years, very few jobs can be done, much less done well, without interacting effectively with other people. It would behoove organizations to consider the interpersonal expectations of all roles—not in place of functional skills—but as an additional toolkit to aid in conflict management, effective communication, and skills needed to build healthy, cooperative working relationships to drive results. Whether your job directly involves emotions are not, results move at the speed of relationships.

We have also seen these numbers shift over the years. In data reported from our original technical manual for the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal almost a decade ago, the differences in EQ scores between individuals in sales, finance, and information technology were insignificant. Only engineering was significantly lower in emotional intelligence. At the time, customer service and HR were the highest scoring professions.

What might be the cause of such shifts? As we know, emotional intelligence can change over time. As the world of work has changed, so have expectations about the human elements of work. Consider sales, for example. Fifteen or twenty years ago, a sales position might have been considered more transactional. Now, with 24-hour buying cycles, technological advances around every corner, and incredible global competition—not just from organizations, but from individuals, leveraging social media—sales roles have had to adapt to be more about

client relationship management. This could suggest that individuals in this profession have acquired more EQ skills or at least put energy into building them, because it ultimately serves them and their commission checks.

### Resilience

Resilience is the ability one has to adapt and bounce back from difficult or stressful situations. In previous research, we mentioned that hard times of any kind—financial, personal, or work-related—can create intense and often prolonged negative emotions. Although external events like global pandemics or economic calamities are responsible for a portion of the challenges in our lives, for the bulk of difficulties we encounter we had at least some small part in creating. Research from our database of the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal shows that one of the areas people score the lowest in is recognizing the role they play in the difficult circumstances they encounter.

In reality, we almost always have a hand in some part of challenges that we are experiencing, whether it is about how we are thinking about the experience or actively behaving in ways that make situations worse. However, research would suggest that many of us struggle to accept blame when bad things happen. No matter the situation, more things are within your control or influence than you may realize. For one, our perception of our emotions matter. People who evaluate negative emotions to be negative are worse off than those who accept them as part of life. An important part of well-being is accepting and normalizing good and bad events and emotions as equal parts of the human experience.

Researchers have also argued that there is a difference between pressure and stress, suggesting that external events or work or personal demands will always produce a certain amount of pressure. Alternatively, stress only happens when pressure is paired with rumination about the events or demands, showing that we have more ultimate control over stress than we think. Ruminating on mistakes made rather than reflecting and learning for the future can lead to negative health outcomes like anxiety, poorer sleep, cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal problems, and chronic pain.

### Change, Change, and More Change

From Stoic philosophers to physicists, US presidents to marketing experts, spiritual leaders to motivational speakers—everyone has an opinion, mindset, or strategy for change. And though change is something humans have been confronting and managing for millennia, we still seem to struggle. Our research suggests that only 13.3%

of us can consistently embrace change early on. From an emotional intelligence standpoint, the ability to embrace change and be an early adopter, can allow you to be more flexible and open to new possibilities or opportunities and can serve you when you have to navigate challenges. Research suggests that openness to change is related to positive emotions and job satisfaction, the ability to implement successful strategic initiatives, and generally, greater career success. Change can also be an important ingredient for individual development and learning, which can feed into increased self-awareness.

### What to do with Regret

Regret, as described in Daniel Pink's book, *The Power of Regret*, is the most "misunderstood emotion" and the unpleasant feeling associated with some action or inaction a person has taken which has led to a state of affairs that he or she wishes were different. In a study of 4,489 people, Pink found that although everyone has regrets, sans kindergarteners, those—like Phineas Gage—who have suffered a traumatic brain injury, or sociopaths, we think about and respond to them differently.

In our research, 50% of survey respondents said that at least some of the time, they do things they regret when upset, which can have substantial long-term impacts on mental health, decision-making, and relationship health. Regret is the type of pressure that when paired with rumination quickly turns molehills into mountains and can create an unnecessary amount of emotional burden. At least half of the population may struggle both to change regretful behavior and to capitalize on the learning after having a regret. Research shows that regret can help improve negotiation skills, decision-making, and strategic thinking and problem-solving skills, when we can reflect and learn from the situations and get feedback from trusted networks about how best to navigate errors in judgment.

For certain regrets—blasting off an ALL CAPS email to a colleague in the heat of a disastrous product launch, angrily yelling at your toddler amid a grocery store meltdown, cheating on your partner during a rough period in your relationship—we may be more motivated to correct our behavior because those events are many times emotionally heavy and we can do something about them. We can apologize and take responsibility for our part in the situation and our impact on someone else. When I was younger, I struggled to apologize for my mistakes, feeling my pride at stake even in seemingly low-stakes situations. Now, I have almost made it a game with myself to apologize as quickly as I realize a gaff or

something that has negatively impacted someone else. The result: apologizing comes faster, more easily, and with less effect to my ego.

If the regret can't be softened with an apology, you can reframe it. You might have regretted studying abroad for a semester and delaying graduation, but at least you made lifelong friends. Pink argues that this type of reframing helps transform regret into relief, which can change how you feel about your behavior, an important element of future self-awareness.

### Emotionally Intelligent Strengths

The human brain is actually wired to think about negative things differently. We process negative emotions largely in the amygdala, the area responsible for detecting potential threats and triggering emotional responses to keep us safe. We also process these emotions more deeply and can typically remember them more vividly than positive emotions, which may help explain a negativity bias in emotional processing that causes us to fixate on things we struggle with or think of as weaknesses.

However, there is a significant benefit to an equal focus, (Gallup might argue an overemphasis), on areas of strength or natural skill. Client feedback over the years inspired us to enhance our Emotional Intelligence Appraisal-Self Edition in 2022 by balancing the focus and including a section on highest emotional intelligence scores and additional strategies to maximize those strengths. This addition has inspired research in areas that could be considered collective natural emotional intelligence skills or abilities and how these may evolve over time.

***I'm Counting on You.*** Our research shows that the highest rated item by individuals responding to the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal, is about how much they can be counted on (average score of 5.34 out of 6). On average, most people would say they can Always or Almost Always be counted on.

This is good news for people in their personal lives and at work. Research has shown that accountability can lead to increased productivity, better performance, and increased trust on teams, which results in more transparent conversations and collaboration. Cultures that put emphasis on accountability have also been shown to reduce individual engagement in unethical or risky behavior.

Interestingly enough, self-perception may create differences in how other people see things. When we compare Self scores with Supervisors, Direct Reports, and Peer rater groups in the 360 version of the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal all rater groups show lower average ratings on this item than individuals rating themselves. Inherently, we may evaluate ourselves based on our intention and impact, while others tend to evaluate us based solely on our impact. Said another way: we give ourselves a break on how we evaluate ourselves because we assume we are mostly trying our best, regardless of the outcome. If you really want to be counted on, make it a habit to check in with people and ask their opinion about this. If your assessment is different from theirs, recalibrate, ask for suggestions about how to improve, and start with small habit changes. Take note of what you say you are going to do and follow through. If something isn't going to go as planned, get out ahead of it and communicate the reality and potential ramifications. Apologize and take responsibility for your actions when you let someone down.

***Feedback.*** Few words in the business lexicon create as much emotional response as the word feedback. Research shows that the same area in the brain that gets activated when you get physically hurt (like a sunburn) is the same area that gets triggered when you get your feelings hurt. This could help explain why constructive feedback—even if true, even if helpful in the long run—may initially feel like a punch in the stomach. Maybe surprisingly, the second highest average item on the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal is about being open to feedback with 71.2% of people indicating they are always or almost always open. What's more, there is self and other agreement. There is no statistically significant difference with how people and their Supervisors, Direct Report, or Peers evaluate openness to feedback, suggesting an alignment in perception.

However, being open to feedback is necessary but not sufficient for capturing its true power. To leverage what you learn from others about your performance or style to help you continue to develop, you have to create habits around it. We suggest scheduling feedback more consistently with your boss, peers, and direct reports so you can provide and receive timely feedback for performance adjustments. Research from Harvard Business Review showed that of 51,896 executives, those who ranked at the bottom 10% in asking for feedback were rated in the 15th percentile in overall leadership effectiveness while leaders in the top 10% (read: rocking

it at soliciting feedback) were rated at the 86th percentile for leadership effectiveness, on average. For those of you who need to get more comfortable providing positive feedback, challenge yourself to give a piece of positive feedback daily or as often as you see it to people you work with in efforts to catch them doing things right and provide positive reinforcement.

### Emotional Intelligence and Important Personal and Organizational Outcomes

When Goleman first popularized the idea of emotional intelligence back in the mid-1990's, a large initial research focus concentrated on whether EQ could be learned. One of the differentiators between EQ and personality or IQ, as previously discussed, is that it is something that can be more easily taught and developed. A 2019 meta-analysis of EQ training looked at 76 published and unpublished studies (pre-post measurement design and treatment-control group design) between 2000-2016. The 4,312 participants included managers, nurses, police officers, sales professionals, teachers, retail staff, as well as undergraduate and graduate students. Analysis across all studies—regardless of design—suggested a moderate, robust positive effect of training on the emotional intelligence scores of participants, regardless of gender. Overall, the meta-analysis showed that EQ training increased EQ scores, suggesting EQ is trainable. This is great news for individuals and organizations who are creating initiatives around EQ training and allocating organizational time and resources to such an effort, but to what end? What does the research show increased emotional intelligence actually does for people and companies? Among the various outcomes shown in research over the past two decades, some of the most interesting include emotional intelligence's relationship to personal well-being, relationship quality, leadership, life satisfaction, academic achievement, income, feedback-seeking behavior, and individual and team performance.

- In one study using a treatment-control group design, 132 participants were randomly assigned to an emotional competence intervention or a control group. The intervention included structured training on the capacity to identify one's own and others' emotions, capacity to understand, express, and manage emotions, as well as the capacity to use emotions to enhance thinking and actions. Results showed that the intervention group demonstrated an increase in their emotional competence compared to the control group but also showed lower cortisol (the stress hormone) secretion, better well-being, and improved relationship quality—

with self and peer agreement in ratings in emotional competence and relationship quality.

- An article from the Journal of Applied Psychology, showed higher emotional intelligence scores predicted more successful management of relational situations in the workplace and leadership, more generally. Additional studies from the same article showed initial evidence for the predictive validity of the emotional intelligence test for life satisfaction, academic achievement, and income. This last outcome is in line with our previous research suggesting that people with high EQs make more money—on average \$29,000 more per year than those with low EQs.
- A study showed that a leader's mood was a factor in feedback seeking behavior by direct reports, suggesting that people may be more likely to solicit developmental feedback when a leader demonstrates more positive emotion and mood. There are clear organizational ramifications around employee growth and development, and organizational considerations including how leader mood may impact psychological safety.
- One study showed that a leader's growth mindset and interpersonal identity were important elements for their humility, which directly impacted work performance of those who worked for them. Leadership researchers would argue that generally, most employees will—on average—have a net negative emotional experience with their bosses. However, this study argues that by demonstrating humility, a leader can increase positive emotional experiences for direct reports, which in turn enhances task performance.
- One study of 212 professionals across organizations and industries showed employees with higher emotional intelligence, especially an accurate perception of emotional cues, displayed higher team effectiveness and job performance in jobs characterized by high managerial work demands. The effect of emotional intelligence was found even after controlling for IQ, personality, emotional labor job demands, job complexity, and demographic control variables.

As more is uncovered about emotional intelligence, more questions emerge. What gets in the way of wanting to learn emotional intelligence strategies and habits? What can help readiness and motivation to improve EQ and subsequent outcomes? How important is hiring for EQ? What might hiring for EQ do to individual performance, culture, and organizational revenue? What does an



expectation of emotional intelligence in leaders do to an organizational culture over time? How can organizations tie metrics of performance and success to emotional intelligence in ways that positively benefit employees, leaders, and organizations?

*What are you most curious about?  
Join in the conversation using hashtag  
#EQhabits to share what you are  
learning, trying, and questions  
you are most curious about.*

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