

BEYOND THEORY: Key Research Findings on Team Emotional Intelligence

Team emotional intelligence may sound like a new topic related to emotional intelligence, but it's been researched and written about for decades. Early work on the study of group dynamics dates back to the 1930s. A 1932 study at Columbia showed that teams of four outperformed individuals at problem solving. The advantage teams offered was social interaction. As team members went back and forth problem solving, incorrect suggestions were rejected by the group 75% of the time. Individuals, on the other hand, caught their own errors only 25% of the time.

A 1952 study demonstrated another kind of social support that group interactions offer during problem solving. Alone, an individual begins to problem solve tentatively. They tend to question their first thoughts. Uncertainty introduces anxious feelings which block their ability to free associate, to finish out the idea, or to find new ideas. A group can offer support to a team member with a half-baked idea through encouraging gestures (like nodding, smiling, and listening intently). This support reassures the team member's anxiety and frees their mind from the interruption.

From the 1970s studies into the early 2000s, the body of research on the influence of emotions on team performance continued to expand and it coincided with Daniel Goleman introducing the concept of emotional intelligence to the business world. In 2004, Dr. Travis Bradberry and Dr. Jean Greaves developed the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® - Team Edition to help team members measure their group's team EQ behaviors. These assessment results allow teams to see how well their group applies the four essential team EQ skills on the job.

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The field of team EQ research is still flourishing with new discoveries and evolving insights. For this book, the team at TalentSmartEQ translated what these research findings mean for teams looking to put behavioral science into practice. Trends and research findings will continue to shape our understanding of team emotional intelligence

as well as yours. We invite you to continue reading for a discussion of topics related to team EQ that may be useful and insightful to your team as you begin your own team EQ journeys. We also invite you to stay in touch with us to continue learning. Discoveries from the body of EQ research, team EQ research, and TalentSmartEQ's applied research are available on our website to encourage continued conversations and insights. To access trends for teams working in specific industries, and other interesting EQ topics, please visit: www.talentsmarteq.com/eqtrends.

Virtual, Remote, and Hybrid Teamwork

The human brain doesn't change drastically with each new generation or century. That said, our understanding of our brains and how we use them and care for them is expanding rapidly. We know, for instance, that areas in the brain adapt to environmental stressors, injury, or disease in remarkable ways. We also understand that neural connections grow and strengthen through repetition and use, just as our muscles grow and strengthen with increasing and repeated use. Your team's we-radar is strengthened through repeated interactions sensed by the mirror neurons in each team member's brain as you watch, listen, react, and talk to each other. At the same time, neglect or disuse can weaken social muscles through the inattention or multi-tasking that technology devices allow.

Your team has a "we-radar" and a "we-mindset" developed through subtle and sophisticated interactions sensed by the mirror neurons in each team member's brain.

Teams dipped their toes into virtual team communications during the 2010s, and by December of 2019 the video conference tool Zoom had about 10 million users. It was the social distancing response to the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 that pushed teams into the deep end of virtual and remote teamwork. By May 2020, Zoom had more than 300 million users. Teams today continue to figure out how to optimize virtual and hybrid teamwork using multiple technology platforms.

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It's early to make definitive conclusions about the impact virtual, and hybrid teamwork will have on managing emotions and relationships. It's also too early to conclude definitively on the impact that processing emotions and cultivating relationships virtually will have on virtual and hybrid team performance. Your attention is in your devices and your eyes and ears are straining to read how team members feel on a screen with some number between 3 and 30 heads gazing at you. Your mirror neurons are used in a different way for hours a day. You and your teammates are working harder mentally and emotionally to compensate for what would be your minds' natural ability to send and receive clear communication between each of you.

Five factors contributing to video conferencing fatigue are being explored by researchers. Each influences the emotion data being absorbed and interpreted by your team as you meet virtually. The first three create fatigue through overload: Excessive amounts of eye gaze, increased self-evaluation from staring at your own image, and the extra focus on fewer cues. The second create fatigue through constraints: Lack of physical mobility and the collapse from sensing emotions in a three-dimensional environment to sensing them in a two-dimensional environment.

Remote communication platforms narrow the range and subtlety of emotion expressions that your mirror neurons detect automatically when you are in the same room with people. The way video calls place everyone in central view is a kind of brain blast that overloads your mind. This view doesn't allow you to focus on one person at a time with others in your peripheral view the way you might in-person. If you select the speaker only view, then you eliminate that valuable peripheral information. You don't see full body postures when heads are reduced to small squares, and your eyes may miss micro-expressions on your teammates faces. A twitch in the eye or eyebrow area, or slight movements near the mouth make a big difference in your perception. Even with audio-only conference calls, you've likely experienced increased difficulty with managing who should speak first after a question and evaluating natural pauses in the conversation.

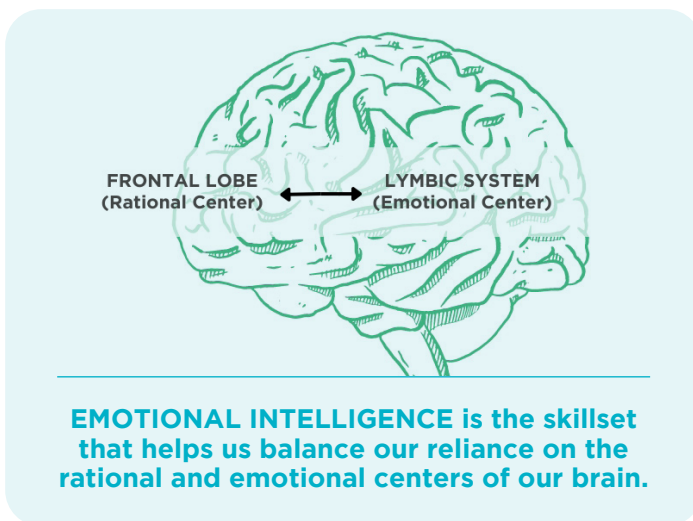
Value your team relationships as a guiding light, and generally head in the direction that invests in the team's emotion and relationship skills.

What does all this mean for you and others working on virtual and hybrid teams? In his book *Social Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman discussed the importance of balancing the efficient communication that technology enables with nurturing in-person interactions and relationships. Teams can choose to value this insight and put to use what you've learned in this book. Value team relationships as your guiding light and generally head in the direction that invests in your team's emotional and relationship skills. You can do this virtually or in-person and it's going to require effort.

Virtual teamwork success will require your team to weigh the pros and cons related to face-to-face, phone, and screen interactions and in what proportion. It may include revisiting unspoken norms between listeners and speakers on screen. In person, looking away or getting up from your chair may mean you're being rude to the speaker. On screen it may be important to break the mental and emotional load from stares and to physically move about. Every team can discuss these matters and try out how the strategies in the book, *Team Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, can be adjusted for video conferencing, conference calls, and in-person settings.

How Your Own EQ Contributes to Team EQ

If you are a reader who is new to the term "emotional intelligence" and if you are now asking what it might offer you in your life outside a team environment, the answer is, a lot! The physical source of emotional intelligence (EQ)



is the two-way communication between rational thoughts located in the frontal lobe and emotions signalling from the limbic system of brain. When a person with a high EQ

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encounters people and situations throughout their day, they notice how they feel, understand what triggers their reactions and why (self-awareness), and constructively manage their words and actions in response (self-management). They notice and empathize with how other people are feeling (social awareness), and take the time to build, deepen, or repair relationships in their social network (relationship management).

Developing emotional intelligence does not mean you ignore your emotions so you can be entirely rational. It also doesn't mean you learn to ignore your logical side so you can be solely emotional. People need both their instinctual feelings and their constructive thoughts to achieve their goals and face life's challenges.

Does increasing your EQ help you become a better teammate? Yes, it certainly does. Handling your own emotions constructively as you work with your teammates is a big help to them. Doing your part to develop healthy

Doing your part to develop healthy relationships with the people on your team also contributes to your team's performance.

one-to-one relationships with the people on your team contributes to your team's performance. Discover your own EQ skill levels in the book Emotional Intelligence 2.0 and find EQ strategies there that will help you achieve success and well-being, even on your most challenging days.

Team EQ Norms

Team norms are one of many team strategies (actions your team can put into practice) to help your group strengthen your emotion management and relationship skills. When agreements are made up front for how to work together and there is buy-in about what is expected from team members, there are fewer surprises, disappointments, frustrations, or irritations between team members. Your team will have fewer negative emotions to manage.

A research team lead by Vanessa Urch Druskat and Peter Wolff, studied which team norms specifically propel group emotional intelligence. The norms they've studied address team EQ behaviors at the individual, group, and organizational level.

If you'd like a suggested set, supported by their research, the following five team norms will help your team operate more effectively within and across team boundaries:

- 1. Continually build an understanding of each other** so team members feel known and understood.
- 2. Continually re-evaluate the status-quo** to include team-level strengths, needs, preferences, and resources.
- 3. Continually plan ahead and think proactively** when problems occur, rather than rigidly or reactively.
- 4. Continually seek information from the larger organization** to understand the needs, preferences, perspectives, and behaviors of important people and teams outside our team.
- 5. Engage and work with colleagues outside the team** to acquire information, resources, and support.

A sixth norm, confronting teammates who break norms, was not supported by their research. They couldn't confirm whether team members had the skills to confront each other without making things worse. The researchers wrote, "Providing difficult feedback, even if it is constructive, so that it can be heard without harming members' sense of safety is not easy and must be skillfully done. Throughout the study, team leaders reported to the researchers that their teams were uncomfortable giving each other feedback."

The Future of Teamwork

The research in the area of teamwork is burgeoning with questions. How will we use virtual, remote, and hybrid team communication to engage, innovate, or create cultures of inclusion? How does technology limit or facilitate teams dealing with their emotions and relationships? A novel approach to this area of study is the use of robots on teams. How can robots help groups working together to better recognize and manage emotions? How can they influence group emotions to positively impact performance?

One 2015 study looked at how a robot teammate can intervene to moderate conflict. Researchers asked 53 teams to troubleshoot an urgent problem in 10 minutes. Each team was made up of three humans and a robot. One human on each team was a carefully trained actor and they expressed one of two trigger statements as the team worked together. One trigger statement was directed with frustration at the task ("That's not a good

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idea”, or “I wouldn’t do that”), and the other was directed with frustration at one of the other team members (“You’re moving too slow,” or “You’re not very good at this.”). To start the personal attack, the actor said, “You’re stupid” to grab the team’s attention.

In immediate response to personal triggers, the robot attempted a repair comment such as “Whoa man, that was inappropriate. Let’s stay positive,” or “Dude, what the heck! Let’s stay positive.” The robot also made positive comments using “we-mindset” language. Examples included “We could try…” or “I really want us to solve this in time.” The study found that these more colloquial statements injected humor (surprise at the robot’s casual language), alleviated tension, and often sparked laughter during the interactions. One person commented, “It doesn’t like you.” Another said, “Haha, the robot thought you were inappropriate.” The most common response was an exchange of looks and nervous laughter.

The research team expected to find that the robot’s comments would reduce the team’s perceptions of conflict. The study found the exact opposite. These teams showed higher perceptions of conflict. The researchers offered one possible explanation. The robot pointing out the personal attack announced there was a team violation and made it more powerful, increasing awareness of the conflict.

When the researchers reviewed the videos of the teams working, they watched participants glance over to the actor to see if they would respond to the robot or apologize. After no apology or response, team members immediately suggested next actions, as though they would rather get back to work than engage with the conflict. In effect, the robot made sure the team violation wasn’t ignored, but the team still didn’t deal with it.

Research shows that suppressing conflict can negatively impact team performance. Stifling the expression of negative feelings over time has been shown to have negative consequences for a person’s health and personal relationships. The robot increased team awareness of conflict, but the conditions necessary to get team members to engage in resolving conflict remain unclear. Perhaps a team that is actively aware of and practicing team emotional intelligence strategies might be better equipped to respond to a robot’s call-out and resolve their conflict.

In a study where mixed robot and human teams played cards, robots that expressed we-mindset phrases (“We are the best!” Or “We were not so good this time…”) were rated as more likable and trustworthy than robots that express phrases that are I-based (“I am impressed with your move!” Or “I played incredibly well!”). This research helps us learn how to facilitate positive feelings among team members (using the “we mindset”) and how to moderate negative feelings that impact a team’s behavior and relationships (calling out and resolving conflict). Even if robots don’t join our teams, we are already learning how to best spread positivity and best manage negativity.

Closing Thoughts

Team members can do a lot to contribute to the health and performance of the teams they are invited to join. Many ideas and team EQ strategies in this book offer insights and guidance for when to speak up, when to check in with a teammate, and when it may be best to say nothing at all. There’s also a limit to how much one team member can do on their own.

Team EQ is a collective effort, a journey to be taken together. Rather than allowing your group’s emotions and relationships to determine how much your team can accomplish, venture to understand and use team EQ skills and strategies to your team’s advantage. To harness the full power of your team’s potential, introduce every team member to the four essential team EQ skills and prepare yourselves for this group adventure. Strive for peak team performance by adding the management of your team’s emotions and relationships to the ways in which you excel. With deliberate practice, your team emotional intelligence skills will elevate the work you already engage in every day and help your team summit the peaks on your horizon.