

5 Myths about Emotional Intelligence

In the past few years Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been widely lauded as the most innovative way to measure smarts since Intelligent Quotient (IQ). [Harvard Business Review](#) called EI a “ground-breaking, paradigm-shattering idea.”

But what does EI mean? How is it useful? And what myths or misconceptions have surrounded it?

Probably the most succinct definition of EI can be found in a [journal article by Professor Lakshmi Kavya](#): “Emotional Intelligence is the process or ability by which we can understand, influence and stabilize our emotions as well as others.” Kavya explains that IQ measurement was dominant in the 19th and early 20th centuries, until Michael Beldoch invented the term in 1964.

In a [1990 article](#), Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer conceived EI in slightly more technical terms: “Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions; to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought; to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.”

Of course, philosophers all the way back to antiquity spoke to the importance of using reason to control or regulate the emotions. [Plato even thought](#) that education begins with emotions and enthusiasm, claiming that “All learning has an emotional base.” The key to self-enrichment and intellectual growth is then to direct and manage the emotions in fruitful ways.

But what are some myths or misconceptions about emotional intelligence? Here are five:

1. *Emotional intelligence is a touchy-feely or feminine capacity:* This is not necessarily true. Going all the way back to ancient Greece, the ability to control or regulate your emotions has been perceived as a masculine trait. However, recent research shows that both men and women can lack emotional intelligence. Likewise, they can have it in abundance. They can also improve it at similar rates.
2. *Emotional intelligence is only good for negotiating personal relationships:* This myth is perpetuated by personal gurus and life coaches who see people's inability to control their emotions in personal relationships as destructive to their overall well-being. However, EI is just as important in business and public life.
3. *Emotional intelligence is primarily about being empathetic and caring for others' emotions:* EI is more about self-awareness than empathy. For instance, a leader with good EI can negotiate an emotionally-charged situation, both controlling their own emotions and diplomatically responding to others' emotionally volatile behavior.
4. *Emotional intelligence predicts whether or not someone will be a success in life:* This misconception was generated by the craze over EI, whereby people thought of it as a panacea for all life's problems. While EI is helpful in life, it's not the only ingredient for success. For instance, some people with high IQ, as well as the ability to comprehend highly technical and abstract problems (think engineers and professors), tend to have low EI. They can be highly successful in life. But they are not considered ideal for management or leadership positions.
5. *Emotional intelligence is innate, arrives at birth, so that you either have it or you don't.* This is the nature or nurture question. Some people do have a better aptitude for EI. Nevertheless, EI can also be learned

and improved over time. For instance, people with low EI can be taught to recognize their own emotional states and put them in check or nonverbal signals by others, indicating their emotional states, and either calm them down or bring them up.

Do you think EI is a quack psychological concept? Or is it a better way to measure smarts than IQ?

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