

EI and DL: A Good Fit

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After working with business and military training for many years, my vocabulary is filled with acronyms. These verbal short cuts are supposed to save time and strengthen organizational communication. But, that often is not the case.

However, I have chosen this title because there IS a good fit between emotional intelligence (EI) training and distance learning (DL). With specific pre/post class activities and rigorous interactive presentation of content, the goals and objectives of EI training can be realized. In this essay, I provide an overview of the discipline, explain my course format, and finally, answer some key questions that are often asked regarding EI and DL.

Overview of EI

Understanding and using emotional intelligence (EI) increases self-esteem, self-control and influence on others. To be effective and successful on the job, individuals cannot rely solely on intellectual skills and technical competence. Success with people is essential to success on the job. Cultivating EI skills helps people see emotions as useful information for navigating the challenging social environment of work.

People often ask, “How is IQ (Intelligence Quotient) different from EIQ (Emotional Intelligence Quotient)?” While there are several distinctions, a key difference is that IQ defines intellectual potential while EIQ defines how well that information can be used in reaching people goals. In other words, IQ may get the interview but EIQ gets the promotion. IQ is linked to cognitive responses that are rooted in language that is time and culture oriented. EIQ is often illogical, disorganized, and inconsistent.

Displayed emotions are often viewed negatively. After all, emotions out of control impair rational thinking, suck energy out of performance, increase misunderstanding, decrease creativity and negatively affect health. However, emotions under control give people purpose, self-motivation, self-fulfillment, energy and insight. Instead of viewing emotions as “stuff” that gets in the way of effective and consistent living, EI views emotions as data for behavioral assessment.

“When careers get knocked off track, the most common reason (75%) is that people lack crucial emotional competencies — they can't deal effectively with interpersonal problems, they can't guide teams through conflicts and other turbulence, and they can't adapt to change or gain trust.” — The Center for Creative Leadership

Course content and procedure

This class provides training in:

1. Perceiving emotions – the ability to detect and decipher emotions in faces, gestures, and situations—including the ability to identify personal emotions. Perceiving emotions represents a basic aspect of emotional intelligence that makes possible all other processing of emotional information.
2. Using emotions – the ability to harness emotions to facilitate various cognitive activities, such as thinking and problem solving. The emotionally intelligent person capitalizes fully upon changing moods to best meet the task at hand.
3. Understanding emotions – the ability to comprehend emotional language and to appreciate complicated relationships among emotions. For example, understanding emotions encompasses the ability to be sensitive to slight variations between emotions, and the ability to recognize and describe how emotions evolve over time.
4. Managing emotions – the ability to regulate emotions in ourselves and others. The emotionally intelligent person can harness emotions, even negative ones, and manage them to achieve intended goals.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand emotional intelligence competencies
2. Understand the difference between IQ and EIQ
3. Increase EQ skills in the four cornerstones of emotional intelligence
4. Manage disruptive emotions that hijack behavior
5. Strengthen working relationships to increase productivity

Procedure:

The purpose of all training is change and the goal of EI training is to increase personal and organizational success. This is best achieved through structured activities before, during and after the DL class.

Pre-Class

Before the class, students are assigned to view and assess “high impact” human-relations situations at work. I use the words, “high impact” in reference to either unusually stressful times or unusually productive times. The only information given at this point is for the student to view work situations which appear emotionally charged. I suggest they spend 30 minutes viewing work situations, identifying actions and results. User friendly forms asking specific questions for the student to consider are provided.

During class

Application of content is achieved through focused in-class activities of sharing, listening, discussing, small group activities, instructor lecture and extensive Q and A. The class begins with guidelines for language use. Verbal standards are established for sharing stories and evaluating these actions. A key EI skill is to learn to evaluate behavior through language that is descriptive rather than judgmental. It is important for any student of EI to learn the difference between, “She made me angry when she walked away from me,” and, “I felt anger when she walked away from me.” While the student may see some behavior as “difficult”, course content helps the student see behavior first as “different.” EI training addresses both the action and the response to it.

Course content is provided in four EI dimensions

1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-Management
3. Social Awareness
4. Relationship Management

Within each area, the student is taught to ask and answer such questions as “What am I feeling right now?”, “why?”, and, “how should I respond?” To do this, the student first identifies **when** emotions are influencing a situation. The next challenge is to discover **how they are affecting me**. Emotional responses are linked to a variety of social paradigms rooted in personal beliefs, history, situations, or assumptions. Sorting out these factors is incredibly challenging. Seeing through the smoke and mirrors is never easy but almost always rewarding. Once the emotional sources and status are hypothesized, course content focuses on evaluating and strategically responding to the individual. The EI challenge is not to control “THEM,” but to strengthen analytical thinking for better self-management. In other words, EI training is to move the student along on the path of becoming their own counselor.

The next step is to apply those same questions to social awareness; defining the context in which people have to work. The final step, the ultimate step, is relationship management. Strengthening the organizational fabric so that work is faster, better, and more fulfilling. The final emphasis of the class is building self-management skills in six areas:

1. Understand the role of emotions in your life
2. Control irrational thoughts
3. Identify emotional triggers
4. Monitor emotional responses
5. Define emotional challenges
6. Manage your emotions in the minute

Post-class

A few days after the class, the student is to review the same stories shared in class. They are to again consider each situation and their interpretation of it. The most important part of this self-analysis exercise is to answer the questions, “How did I interpret and respond to this situation? How did it influence my feelings/understanding of the people involved?” What would I do differently if faced again with a similar situation?”

In addition to this personal review, some organizations schedule follow-up classes. Held between 3 to 6 months after the first class, students review, share and discuss new insights and questions.

Commonly Asked Questions:

1. *How often do students take the class without doing the pre-work?*

Most organizations start with a pilot class. This class usually includes organizational leaders and highly motivated adults. The response of this group generally motivates following groups to do their pre class home-work. Yes, there are always some who participate in the session without formally doing the pre-class exercise. And, even without doing the pre class work, the course is effective. Please note that I do not instruct students to write out their situation observations before class. I have found that a “write-out” requirement can discourage class members as the activity may seem like a form of gossip or tale-bearing. Also, I have found that most in the class have already seen high intensity emotional situations at work apart from any homework assignment. They have seen situations in real-life but just did not know how to process them. EI training gives them the ability to do this.

2. *What tools do you use to build on-line participation?*

The first step for on-line training is to find and maintain a personal comfort zone with the student. If this is their first on-line situation, it will be somewhat stilted. To overcome that, I find a personal point of contact person for each location. I also maintain a roster of participant names and ask questions to the group such as “How have you seen emotions impact your work?” and even, “What would you like to know about your facilitator?” If there are several people in a viewing location, I might ask, “Write down three words that you feel describe you.” When they have done this, I then ask them to share them. There is usually a good bit of humor and honesty in these times of personal interaction. The exchange of information always creates a better comfort done between facilitator and participant.

The major tool, however, is a committed and interactive facilitator. Any DL based discussion of emotions must include a facilitator who is willing to share emotions in the activity. I value the classroom time. One personal piece of advice I was given years ago was this, “Long after people have forgotten what you said, they will

remember how you made them feel.” And, after 30 years of teaching college and business adults, I know that bit of IE wisdom to be true.

3. *Is there a danger in making office events a case-study?*

Yes. That is why I carefully unpack the use of effective evaluative language for the exercise. While honesty and relevance are vital to learning, wisdom and diplomacy are equally as vital for success. I believe that this approach works as I have never had to stop a student-shared story. And, I do share with each class that I will stop a story at any time if it appears information is becoming too sensitive due to personal or potential legal issues. It must also be noted that I do the same when teaching the class in a traditional class-room setting.

4. *What do you do when dealing with behaviors where there are no easy answers?*

The student of EI desires to increase workplace productivity and satisfaction by better understanding the interaction between emotion and behavior. Any growth in this skill is profitable so there is merit in learning. However, human behavior is a multi-faceted discipline linked to psychological issues, birth order, diet, physical health, fatigue, stress, work situation and much more. We’ve all seen enough day-time television to know that human behavior is complex! While the IE DL class is a first step to deepening awareness of the complexity of human behavior, it is essential that students in the class are aware of organizational HR services and requirements as well as those of the greater community. Many situations have no easy answer. In fact, in some situations, the only answer is to as carefully listen as you embrace the question. Perhaps, the greatest EI tool is careful compassion.

In Conclusion:

EI and DL are a good fit. The challenges are real and so are the benefits. I have said in many skill-building training sessions, “the greatest abilities are ‘avail-ability, ‘rely-ability,’ and ‘account-ability.’” All of these are strengthened through effective use of emotional intelligence.