

# Next Generation Leader Development

Emotional Intelligence could be the key to changing mind-sets and engaging your senior leaders in transformational development.



## Introduction

When leaders start knocking on the door of the C-suite, or their own next level up, they often carry de-railers that they are trying to keep in check. They may well have all the necessary skills and technical competences, but it's often behaviours which will constrain them in their next role. These can be deep rooted, and are connected with character, judgement and attitudes.

Increasingly, Emotional intelligence is being identified as 'the difference that makes the difference' in the long term career and performance success of high potential managers. The competency models of the 1980s and 90s begin to map the territory of higher and consistent performance, but in themselves could not fully articulate what sustainable leadership achievement comprised. This field of enquiry began to unfold in the work of psychological researchers like Bar-On and Gardner. John Mayer and Peter Salovey coined the term 'emotional intelligence' in the 1990s, and with Bar-On's first iteration of the EQi instrument in 1997, provided some of the context for Daniel Goleman's more publicly accessible books on the subject in the same decade.

Nearly twenty years on and too often development still focuses more on skills and competency, rather than personal capacity, emotional intelligence, creativity and mind-set. These are the intangibles that we now discover can make a huge difference. This is why organisations often have a population of senior or potential leaders who believe that Learning and Development isn't for them anymore. Ironically it's this population that need highly individual and nuanced development to help them move to the next level.

### **So how do you engage with this population and move the conversation from skills to personal capacity, emotional intelligence, and mind-set?**

Over the years we have found that Emotional Intelligence (EI) assessment and diagnostic tools can frame a Learning and Development programme differently in the minds of the participants. This encourages the participants to dig deep and typically opens up a rich and engaging dialogue.

In this paper we explore how EI assessment, if used with thought, and contracted carefully with participants, can help achieve the following in your L&D programmes:

1. The framing of the intervention at a deeper level, **creating engagement**.
2. Gaining personal insights from participants that inform and **tailor the programme**
3. **Increasing the trust** and mutual respect across the participants
4. Allows participants to **address personal de-railers**
5. Highlights and promotes **wellbeing & emotional health** in participants
6. Is vital to **embedding personal change**.

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## 1. Creating Engagement

So let's start by looking at how engagement was transformed by using an Emotional Intelligence Profile at the start of the programme. As with any leadership learning, there are often concerns from internal stakeholders that participants will be **too busy, and not interested enough to engage fully in the programme**.

Through carefully positioning of the chosen tool and a debrief session with participants, we find that participants exhibit great curiosity and interest in their profile. Many participants admitted that they had found the debrief conversation to be one of the most intimate and powerful they had ever had in their lives. During the process, we are able to answer questions participants have about the wider programme, and allay their fears. Through the EI conversation, they recognise that the programme is meeting them where they are in their own development. It gives them an opportunity to personalise their learning, and to realise that development areas that had previously been considered too hard to address, could in fact be addressed through the programme. This included things like courage, decision making under pressure, confidence, dealing with fear and strong emotional reactions. It also built trust between participants and the facilitation team as close 1-1 coaching relationships are created from the start. This process frames the programme at a much deeper level for the participants, and engages them in the developmental process.

## 2. Tailoring the Programme

EI tools give the coach a real insight into the participant's possible defensive routines, and likely reactions to pressure. The intelligence we gain from an EI diagnostic illuminates how sessions might go, and where any resistance to the process might be. Through the debrief process, we gain insight into the kind of issues and challenges the participants face, and what they are looking to gain from a development opportunity. **This meant we could tailor the programme accordingly.**

For example, one report showed clearly that a person was dismissive towards others, often struggling to control emotions, and prone to aggression. Going into such a conversation we took particular care to build strong trust and rapport, and to ensure the participant owned and accepted the report.

In contrast, other participants may show low levels of self-regard: consistently criticising themselves in their heads, bottling up emotion until it flooded out, and avoiding thinking about their own needs or priorities. It may be powerful to have this mirrored back or work done, on how that person reflected on events, thought about themselves and others, and used their self-talk.

We are consistently impressed by how open participants are to discussing difficult issues. Although these kind of patterns cannot easily be changed in a short coaching session, the tools set a meaningful and valuable agenda for ongoing development and the fact this is personally tailored within the context of the EI conversation is intensely powerful.

### 3. Increasing the Trust

In some organisations, we run the debriefing process as a team. While results from any personality tool are confidential, we contract for an appropriate level of healthy sharing of learning and insight, in a team setting.. Working with all of the participants, even with a confidential process such as this, meant that participants could see the development was valued by others. In particular, when people saw others were working on their own personal change agendas, and becoming more aware of themselves and others, mutual respect grew. With that, curiosity, engagement and interest in the process grew. This openness increases **trust** across the team and higher levels of **mutual respect**. This process helps build a support network and accelerates the learning process.

### 4. Addressing Personal De-railers

A focus on EI can help participants identify their personal "de-railers" - for example, low emotional control.. Participants got over anxious, fired quickly to anger, or were triggered in some way which resulted in them reacting in a way which undermined their credibility or led to undesired outcomes. Here, through exploring these patterns, working with physiological reactions in the body, and through consciously redesigning the pattern to give more choices in the moment, we can create real shifts in reactions and behaviours. Such shifts included **being able to say "no"**, **being able to challenge constructively**, and **being able to handle conflict well**. EI profiles can create real focus for these conversations rather than talking about abstract models to help change behaviour.



## 5. Wellbeing & Emotional Health

EI tools also impact many personal wellbeing themes. Consistently, we have found that participants, in becoming more aware of their inner emotional worlds, were able to access strategies that enhanced their wellbeing or personal happiness. These included being more emotionally present at home, eating more healthily, taking more exercise, and generally looking after themselves better. Many were very motivated that their organisation cared enough about them to give them this opportunity and learning. The impact of **improvements in emotional health** also spread down to the leaders' teams and organisations, particularly where aggressive or defensive behaviour patterns had been strong.



## 6. Embedding personal change

It is vital to remember that the various EI Profiles are just tools. It opens up the conversation, but it isn't the truth. It is just a model. It is the conversation arising from the EI Profile that contains the developmental edge; one that opens a person's mind to what is possible. **With skilled facilitation, each participant owns their results.**

A mechanism that worked powerfully was to invite participants to focus in on one, or maximum two changes they were going to make initially as a result of their learning from the debrief. It is the skill of the coach working with the participant that hones this to a narrow focus that will make a difference for that person. We support the participants in designing a ritual, behaviour or habit shift that would embed this change. When we come together again, we review how this had worked, and where good progress had been made, we move onto another area of focus. This worked well as often many areas link around a particular habit, belief or behaviour.



## In Conclusion – The Business Impacts

In conclusion, EI profiling is a valuable tool that we have seen open the doors for mid to senior leaders to engage with powerful leadership development. It combines psychological education with a highly personal approach. It makes accessible the workings of the brain and hormonal systems, and how these impact on everyday leadership activities, events and challenges. In doing this, it builds confidence in an individual's capacity to transform and evolve while building a strong relational foundation with facilitators from the start of a development programme.

This focus on EI as the catalyst for change and the foundation of the programme can be hugely powerful. The shifts initiated can lead to some noticeable impacts on **business effectiveness**. For example, **decision making** becoming **less driven by ego**, and involve **more listening**, respect for others, and connection. Many improve their ability to delegate and to grow their team members, creating good payback in skills development. Others improve their emotional agility in handling conflict. Emotional Intelligence engages leaders in how they think about and dealt with conflict. Simple conflict handling skills, linked to emotional responses and triggers, and delivered to exactly the right spot, made a big difference.

Being able, as leaders, to be creative and to hold the space for innovation, and the associated risk, is an emotionally and politically charged challenge in many organisations. Through helping people to understand themselves and their team's reactions better here, innovation initiatives were better able to flourish.

Levels of trust grow, resulting in stronger collaboration and teamwork. People begin to recognise the importance of trusting others, and in being worthy of trust themselves – and how they erode this without intending to.

If you would like to discuss how this approach might be used to build leadership in your organisation, give us a call on .....



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Liz has over 25 years of Management and consulting experience with a background primarily in strategic consulting, with emphasis on the implementation of strategic change and the development of leadership and management capability. She works with leaders and teams to transform their organisations through increasing their insight and their ability to lead and influence.