

# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: WHY NOW?

## Thought Leadership

The world has changed beyond recognition. COVID-19 has upended our lives to the point where aspects of our day-to-day existence are unrecognizable—working from the kitchen table, homeschooling, isolation from family and friends, having to find new ways to interact and stay connected, coping with the threat, reality, and consequences of serious illness. Things we took for granted have become a really big deal. It's unsettling, stressful, and traumatic.

At the same time, the media constantly bombards us with everything else we need to worry about, be fearful of, and be disturbed by. The injustice of inequity in the workplace. Horrific levels of gun violence. The devastating effects of global warming. Violation of human rights. People, especially adolescents, are facing mounting mental health issues. They're crying out to be listened to and heard—they're desperately searching for meaning and hope.

Business leaders face an unprecedented array of critical challenges—revamping or even reinventing their businesses in the face of drastically shifting demand; responding agilely to ever-changing restrictions; making tough decisions that affect people's livelihoods. And on top of this, they must engage a workforce trying to deal with the social, environmental, and economic challenges that have become a part of everyday life.

In times of crisis, people want to be reassured that there is a steady hand on the tiller, but they also need to know leadership cares about what they're going through; they need empathy, they want to see humility.

It's a perfect storm—a juggling act for leaders focusing on business needs, managing their own emotions, and responding to their people with

empathy and inspiration. Everyone needs support—all the way to the top. Pairing business expertise with Emotional Intelligence is no longer a nice-to-have, but a table stake. CEOs differentiate themselves through leading with real humanity, authenticity, and heart, rather than simply with instructions and direction.

So, "Emotional Intelligence—why now?" All of this is why now.

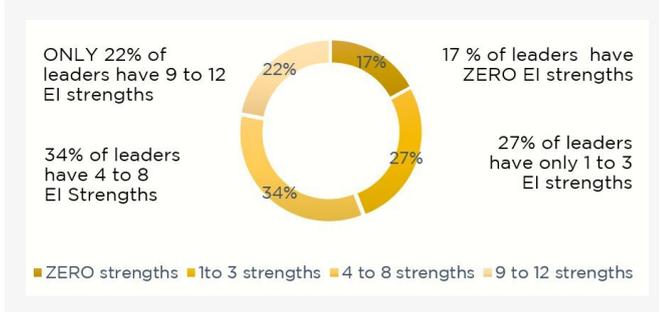
Emotional Intelligence is "**recognizing** our own feelings and those of others, **motivating** ourselves, **managing** emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships." —Daniel Goleman

## The Emotional Intelligence gap

According to our research, only 22% of 155,000 leaders have real strengths in Emotional Intelligence (EI)—where people see them as often, or consistently, showing at least 9 of 12 EI competencies. The remaining 88% of leaders show moderate strength or less. There's a huge gap between the crying need for emotionally intelligent leadership and leaders' ability to deliver on that requirement.

**Figure 1**

The distribution of EI strengths among leaders.



Certainly, healing responses need to start with empathy—with listening to, recognizing, and understanding the feelings of others, particularly, in those cases where people have been impacted directly, or even vicariously, from an issue or event. People cannot begin to solve problems or move forward while they feel unheard.

Even before these recent traumatic events, organizations were experiencing a heightened need for EI in day-to-day business.

As the pace of change and emergence of new kinds of competitors require more agility, adaptability, and innovation from organizations, the need for EI also increases. Adaptability itself is a form of EI and is required of almost everyone in an organization, if constantly changing demands are to be met. Innovation is the most fragile type of performance and is highly responsive to the quality of relationships and communication with managers, teammates, and internal or external clients. Again, EI is key.

And then there are generational disparities to add into the mix. The younger generations of employees expect more meaning and engagement in their work—and if they don't find

it, they'll move on. Providing meaning and evoking engagement are two-way communication tasks—and therefore are dependent on EI—to understand the team's reactions and to provide the leadership, coaching, and other communications that produce meaning and engagement. For leaders to help people to understand the significance of their cog in the wheel, and to inspire their contribution, especially in these tough times, takes a level of understanding and ability to relate like never before.

## Emotional Intelligence and the emotional and social competencies

Emotional Intelligence can sound daunting—something you either have or you don't—but really, it's simply a set of competencies, each of which can be developed.

Dan Goleman's highly regarded book *Emotional Intelligence* brought the whole issue of this subject, and the research behind it, to public attention. His follow-up book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, focused specifically on how different aspects of EI underpin outstanding work performance. This second publication incorporated substantial competency research led by David McClelland at McBer and Hay Group (now part of Korn Ferry) in the 1960s, through the 1990s. McClelland and McBer/Hay Group investigated competencies—the personal characteristics, thought patterns, and behaviors that distinguished outstanding performance from typical. McBer's 200 studies covered the full spectrum of roles from police officers to riverboat deckhands, to senior executives, identifying competencies that generally included substantial emotional and/or social components. At this point, EI was conceptualized as being composed of, and expressed by, discrete emotional competencies which fit together in a certain way. Deeper

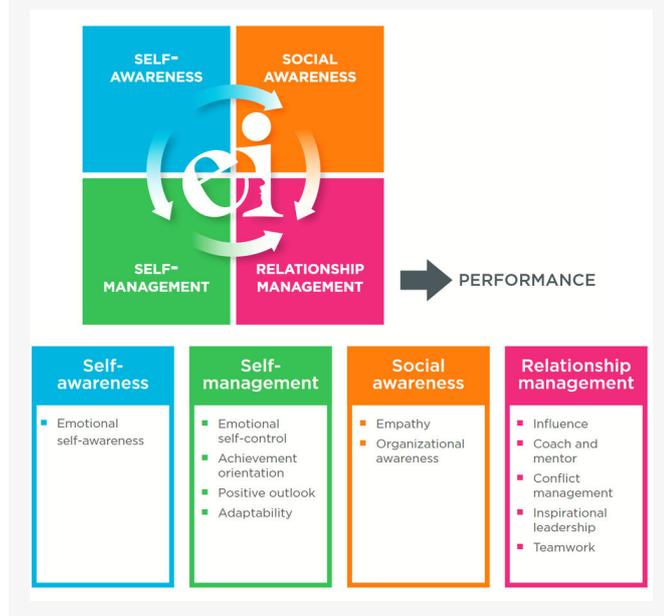
“My biggest skill is an ability to work with people. An ability to build relationships with people, and relationships built on trust, relationships built on can-do that are **completely open and transparent.**”

—Australian woman CEO on the importance of emotional intelligent leadership

qualities, such as Self-Awareness function as necessary precursors to other groups of competencies, as shown in the graphic below.

**Figure 2**

The Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) model.



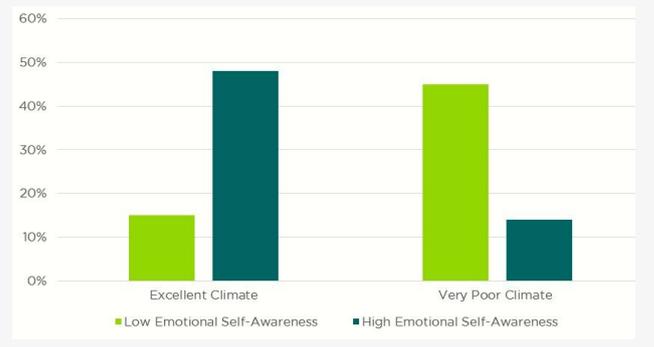
Emotional Intelligence research has continued on an ever-widening range of roles and organizations, across all continents, with the exception of Antarctica. Some of this research used qualitative interview methods similar to the foundational research incorporated in *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. One such example is detailed in the book, *The Indian CEO: a Portrait of Excellence*, which describes a study of 30 of the best CEOs in India.

An extensive line of research uses the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI), a 360 degree survey co-developed by Richard Boyatzis, Dan Goleman, and Hay Group. This covers the most frequently seen emotional and social competencies. Most of the research includes various independent measures of performance, according to the role and organization. Over time, these measures became increasingly forward-looking. For example, the emerging strategic challenges of an organization were identified, and then “outstanding” performers would be those who were already successful in *addressing those challenges*, regardless of the person’s previous performance against other measures. In recent years, this research has integrated insights and data regarding neurological and neuro-endocrine systems as part of Emotional Intelligence.

A recent analysis confirmed that there is a direct relationship between Emotional Self-Awareness and the quality of the climate the team. Leaders who have strong Emotional Self-Awareness (the starting point of the ESCI model) are more likely to create a climate that their teams see as enabling excellence and high-performance.

**Figure 3**

Leaders with high Emotional Self-Awareness are more likely to create excellent climates.



Another study found that employees at poor-performing companies were 79 percent more likely to have low overall Emotional Self-Awareness than those at firms with robust Return-on-Resources (ROR).

## The Emotional and Social Competency Inventory 360

The ESCI is a 360-degree feedback tool, with five rater categories. The 360 survey format was chosen because it is closest to the day-to-day practical value of EI—its effect on other people. In a 360-degree survey, it’s important to maintain anonymity so that raters can be frank and honest. The ESCI achieves this by requiring at least two raters in every category except the “manager.”

As stated on the Korn Ferry website:

- At an individual level, the ESCI—often combined with coaching—can help leaders and key contributors determine what outstanding performance means for them within their role and decide which competencies they want to work on. The ESCI is not intended for use in HR resource management activities: selection, promotion, salary decisions, etc.

The benefit of the 360 format is that it provides individuals with nuanced feedback about the effect they have on different groups of people around them. Like any 360 survey, it should never

“I was hit in the face with the epiphany that as a leader, I did not need to have all the answers, but in fact, if I surrounded myself with people who were smarter than me in critical areas, we could collectively move our business **much further and faster.**”

— CEO describing a key moment of her Self-Awareness and its implications.

be used for selection, performance management, or other consequential HR decisions. It is certainly not a measure of performance. *The ESCI is designed for development—to be used to help people improve their work and their lives, and the effect they have on those they interact with.*

**Figure 4**

The ESCI database.



There are some important things to know about the ESCI:

1. The emotional and social competencies are **learnable**. Even empathy has been found to be teachable, with good real-world performance results. Korn Ferry has produced guides for developing these competencies.
2. A powerful first step to development is **personal feedback**, such as that provided by the ESCI.
3. The ESCI, as an instrument, has been **thoroughly researched and validated** across cultures, and in many roles. It has strong psychometric properties.
4. The tool has been used **extensively across the globe**. Many of Korn Ferry’s clients use it repeatedly due to the considerable value they derive from it.

5. The ESCI, focuses on the **most frequent and most useful emotional competencies**, without intending to provide an exhaustive catalog. We also recognize that not all twelve competencies are relevant to every role, at every time. This is one reason individual coaching is so powerful in developing competencies—to help focus efforts where they will be most productive.

6. Korn Ferry is committed to using ESCI data **only for the purposes** that were disclosed to the participants and raters when the data was collected (as with all our assessment data).

Is Emotional Intelligence a panacea for all of society’s troubles? Of course not. Does it address all the deep and detailed context of people’s lives and work? It most certainly does not. EI, and the ESCI, focus on what we, as individuals, can directly influence—our own responses to the situations we face. The idea of EI, the powerful feedback of the ESCI, and the personalized coaching that follows it, call forth the nobility of the human spirit to care for others and work to make people’s lives better in ways that they themselves want.

So, here’s the challenge. The stress and trauma that affects us all makes Emotional Intelligence harder. At the same time everyone needs to be treated with care, empathy, and respect, now more than ever. Paradoxically, by digging for our deepest values and reaching for our highest purpose, so as to give meaning and hope to others, we may find that we strengthen and even heal ourselves, as well.

## Authors

### Signe Spencer

Client Research Partner,  
Korn Ferry Institute

### Heather Barnfield

Senior Director, Intellectual Property Development  
Korn Ferry Institute

## References

- Boyatzis, R. E., Gaskin, J., & Wei, H. (2015). Emotional and social intelligence and behavior. In S. Goldstein, D. Princiotta, & J. A. Naglieri (Eds.), *Handbook of intelligence: Evolutionary theory, historical perspective and current concepts*. New York, NY: Springer Science and Business Media.
- Emmerling, R., & Boyatzis, R. (2012). Emotional and social intelligence competencies: Cross cultural implications. *Cross Cultural Management*, 19(1), 4-18.
- Korn Ferry. (2017). *ESCI research guide and technical manual*. Los Angeles, CA: Korn Ferry Institute.
- Korn Ferry. (2017). *Women CEOs speak*. Los Angeles, CA: Korn Ferry Institute.
- Korn Ferry. (2018). *Australian women CEOs speak*. Los Angeles, CA: Korn Ferry Institute.
- Korn Ferry. (2019). *The Black P&L leader*. Los Angeles, CA: Korn Ferry Institute.
- Korn Ferry. (2020). *CEOs for the future*. Los Angeles, CA: Korn Ferry Institute.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Reiss, H. (2018). *The empathy effect*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True Press.
- Spencer, L., & Spencer, S. (1993). *Competence at work*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- Spencer, S., Rajah, T., Narayan, S. A., Mohan, S., & Lahiri, G. (2007). *The Indian CEO* (Response Books). New Delhi, India: Sage.
- Zes, D., & Landis, D. (n.d.). A better return on self-awareness. *Korn Ferry Briefings*. New York, NY: Korn Ferry Institute.

### About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers.