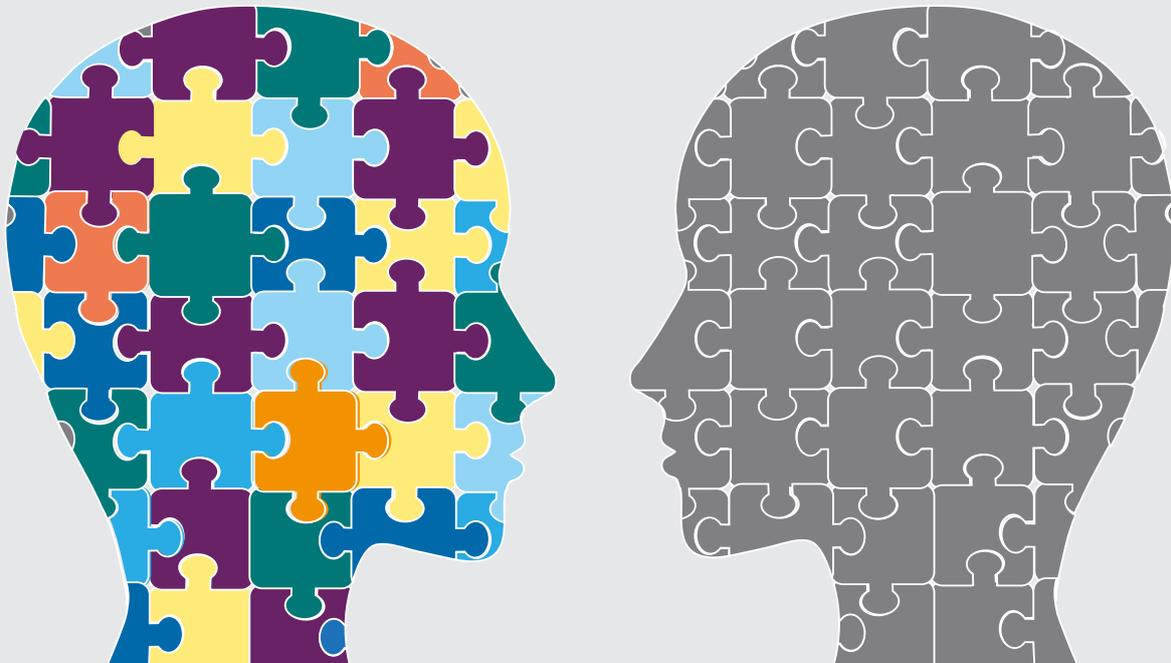


# Emotionally Intelligent Leadership

A great leader must be able to adapt, inspire and relate to others.  
**Julian Birkinshaw**, Criticaleye Thought Leader and Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at London Business School, explains why emotional intelligence is a fundamental skill for senior executives



## Can you start by explaining what emotional intelligence (EQ) is?

It's the ability to connect with people at an emotional level, which includes being able to empathise, build rapport and develop relationships. It also means being able to act on intuition as well as on scientific fact.

It's a list of qualities that you cannot boil down to hard, quantifiable, logical or rational evidence on paper.

## Why is EQ important in an executive role?

It's almost impossible to overstate how important the ability to relate to those around you is for a senior executive. You can be a very successful executive with strong EQ and without many technical skills, but the reverse is simply not true.

It's an executive's job to make difficult decisions. They have to base them, in

part, on hard scientific evidence, but often they will have to reach a decision on an issue where no amount of hard evidence can be brought to bear.

Effective leaders understand when to base decisions on evidence, but they also know when to trust their gut feel or intuition.

For instance when Steve Jobs created the iPod and iPhone, there was no proof that there was a market for them. >



And when Amazon created the Kindle there was little evidence that the company had the skills to make it a success, or that customers had the need for an electronic book reader.

Ultimately, a combination of evidence and intuition is what makes for good decision making.

### Can you describe what an executive with a high EQ might look like?

You can be a very good functional or technical manager without EQ, but the higher you get in an organisation, the more your job relies on intangible aspects: how you read a situation, how you relate to people and how you build excitement and enthusiasm around your efforts and initiatives.

An emotionally intelligent boss will adjust; the way they lead one

employee is different to the way they lead another.

One person may be given a lot of freedom and opportunity to express themselves; the other may have tight boundaries and a lot of direction because they won't cope well with unstructured problems.

You have to be a chameleon and adapt to different people and circumstances.

### You mention that EQ is intangible, is it possible to measure?

We can certainly measure it in a soft way but we can't come up with a hard EQ measure, there is no measurement equivalent to IQ. However, what we can do is gain a sense of how people perceive a leader and their level of EQ.

### Do you think there's an element of subjectivity to EQ?

Absolutely, the very nature of it is about people's perception and opinions.

Emotional intelligence reveals itself in the interactions you have with others. Basic IQ can be measured by answering a number of puzzles on a page, but you can only know if somebody is emotionally intelligent by watching how they relate to others. They know when to push and pull back, when to ask questions and when to be decisive.

### Do leaders often underestimate the value of EQ?

The more senior someone gets, the more they understand its importance. When we run our programmes at London Business School, we try to persuade 25-year-olds that EQ is important but they don't get it

because they've rarely been in a situation where they've had to persuade and influence people.

On the other hand, when you have a group of people in their mid-30s or older, they completely understand. They realise how much of a difference this is going to make to their career.

### Can EQ be learnt or developed?

If you want to become more emotionally intelligent, you have to actually unlearn a lot of bad habits and put in place good habits that may come unnaturally to you.

Most people have risen through the ranks of an organisation by being task-focused and control orientated. A key part of emotional intelligence is actually knowing how and when to let go and how to build up people around you, rather than doing everything yourself.

The more senior a leader gets, the more important EQ will become. Good leadership is about understanding who you are and how people perceive you. ■

#### CRITICALEYE COMMENT

Both high IQ and EQ are essential for great leadership. We need to understand our own motivations, and why a sense of purpose is about aligning our values with the way we work. Only then are we truly capable of communicating a vision and taking people on that journey.

Leaders need to be able to unleash the potential of others by instilling trust through authenticity, clarity of purpose and an openness to continual learning. Ultimately, good leadership is about taking the time to assist and empower others to lead themselves.



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