
APPLYING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A Practitioner's Guide

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CHAPTER

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The Key Ingredients of Emotional Intelligence Interventions: Similarities and Differences

In four chapters, psychologists with highly regarded change programs in EI have described how they help people enhance their social, emotional, and personal functioning. Their four programs come from different perspectives, rely on different theories, and likely create different sorts of change.

The four programs involve the school-based emotional intelligence (EI) intervention of Brackett and Katulak (Chapter 1), the managerial emotional competence intervention of Boyatzis (Chapter 2), the workplace EI intervention of Kornacki and Caruso (Chapter 3), and the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Intelligence Training (MBEIT) of Ciarrochi, Blackledge, Bilich, and Bayliss (Chapter 4).

In this chapter, we review and compare the four programs. Some of the similarities and differences among programs are fairly easy to keep in mind. For example, with the exception of the Brackett and Katulak work (Chapter 1), which concerns children, all the rest are focused on adults. Moreover, the work by Boyatzis and by Kornacki and Caruso is primarily addressed to adults at work.

There are, however, other differences. In this brief chapter, we will compare the approaches as to theory, to techniques of change, and to plausibility of their effectiveness.

□ Theory

The approaches come from quite different theoretical orientations. The Brackett and Katulak program, as well as the program by Kornacki and Caruso, most closely deal with EI as a focused ability. Both of these programs are based on the four-branch model of Mayer and Salovey,¹ which states that EI involves the accurate perception of emotion, the use of emotion to facilitate thought, understanding emotion, and managing emotion. Both programs follow that outline, though in different ways. The Brackett and Katulak program, for example, teaches those four areas, whereas the Kornacki and Caruso program integrates the four areas in a stepwise progression of learning that can be used, and enriched, over a person's ongoing, repeated, work interactions.

The Boyatzis and Ciarrochi programs are, arguably, more general in scope and aim toward a more general coaching effect – one that extends beyond EI proper. Although this is true of the earlier programs as well, these latter two programs appear more focused on personality development than on EI specifically. What they both have in common is their goal of promoting behavior that stays value congruent, even in the context of intense, negative emotions (what Ciarrochi terms “emotionally intelligent behavior,” see Chapter 4). The Boyatzis program is largely derived from Intentional Change Theory. This theory posits that people go through a sequence of discoveries, which help them to become more socially and emotionally effective and to develop and move toward an ideal self.

The Ciarrochi program is based on the theories of Hayes and colleagues, which posit that ordinary language processes and experiential avoidance contribute to people becoming socially and emotionally effective. The theory posits concrete manipulations for undermining an individual's potentially harmful use of language and avoidance – and moving them toward greater mindfulness and psychological health.

□ Techniques

The four interventions described in this book employ a variety of techniques that are both interesting and creative. One can always create a “novel” intervention that, however, uses established procedures and adds functionally trivial “bells and whistles.”² For that reason, it is often productive to evaluate the known mechanisms of change within those interventions.²⁻⁴ Once we identify the mechanisms, then we can evaluate each one to see if it is effective (i.e., does better than a placebo condition). Effective mechanisms then can be added to an intervention, and

ineffective ones dropped. In this way, intervention research can create progressively better interventions rather than evaluating an endless array of therapeutic packages.

We have informally divided the techniques into two broad areas: those aimed at enhancing EI within the framework of the four-branch model,¹ and those aimed at enhancing social and emotional functioning more generally (See also Chapter 5 on "Personality Function and Personality Change" for more on this approach.) In this chapter, techniques that address the four-branch model are organized branch-by-branch into perception, using, understanding, and managing emotions. The personality area is divided into effective emotional orientation, defusion, value clarification, value instruction, increasing the amount and accuracy of self-feedback, and increasing knowledge of effective and ineffective behaviors.

Techniques Aimed Specifically at Emotional Intelligence, as Conceptualized by the Mayer and Salovey Ability Model

We begin with a group of techniques that are especially focused on emotional knowledge and skill.

Techniques to Enhance Identifying Emotions

Every socioemotional learning (SEL) program we are aware of targets emotional identification. It seems to be central to the interventions based on the school-based and workplace EI interventions. For example, the school-based EI intervention helps students to gain a holistic understanding of feeling words by teaching them emotion labels and then encouraging them to apply these labels across a number of contexts (e.g., real world situations, family situations). They also may explore feeling words in creative writing tasks. The programs by Brackett and Katulak for children and Kornacki and Caruso for adults at work both have extensive exercises based on improving such skills.

The managerial emotional competence intervention (Chapter 2) emphasizes not just emotional awareness but also accurate awareness of one's own competencies. The intervention increases awareness by having people engage in a variety of activities and provide extensive feedback on how they performed. Other SEL programs also target awareness in general, rather than focusing on awareness of emotions per se.⁵

Mindfulness-based EI training (MBEIT) helps people to become mindfully aware of emotions as they occur. One exercise involves asking people to close their eyes and imagine leaves floating by on a stream. Once people have this image in their head, they are instructed to watch for

emotions, thoughts, and images that show up. As each one shows up, they are to place it on a leaf and watch it go by on the stream. The presumption is that once people become aware of emotions, they are better able to identify them.

Techniques to Enhance Using Emotion to Facilitate Thought

Using emotion involves the ability to recognize what emotions are best for different situations, to harness emotional energy to facilitate thinking and behavior, and to generate optimal emotional states for different contexts. This seems to be most clearly targeted in the school-based and workplace EI interventions and less so in the other interventions. For example, Kornacki and Caruso's workplace EI intervention illustrates how to influence other people's emotions, and teaches people which emotions are ideally suited for different types of activities. For example, happy mood is ideally suited for creative activities like brainstorming.

An interesting disagreement regarding such interventions concerns the four-branch model view of using emotion¹ and the mindfulness-based (MBEIT) view of Ciarrochi. The latter regards attempts to generate particular emotional states as often problematic (Chapter 4). Rather, MBEIT encourages people to learn to accept whatever emotions show up during the course of engaging in a valued activity. Thus, they might learn to feel sad and engage in brainstorming.

Naturally, given its theoretical outlook, MBEIT does not teach the generation of emotional states, but it does not assume that such attempts are always ineffective. It may be that in some circumstances generating emotions is helpful, and in other circumstances, it is unhelpful. Future research can help to decide if that is the case, and, if so, when using a given approach is best.

Techniques to Enhance Emotional Understanding

This area involves understanding the causes of emotions in oneself and others, and understanding how they progress and transform over time. Again, both Brackett and Katulak's and Kornacki and Caruso's interventions address this area. For example, both interventions ask people to engage in a number of activities that help them to recognize the situations that elicit particular emotions.

In contrast, Boyatzis' managerial emotional competence intervention is likely to indirectly target this dimension by helping people to become aware of what they and others are feeling in certain critical situations, and to understand when others become anxious or angry. This necessitates using and clarifying emotional vocabulary. Ciarrochi's mindfulness-based

(MBEIT) approach also is likely to indirectly target this dimension by increasing mindful awareness of emotions as they occur, which should help people to notice the causes of emotions and how they progress over time (see description of mindfulness exercise above). These speculations need to be tested empirically. It is possible that the more indirect approach of these latter two programs may not target this dimension as effectively as more direct techniques.

Emotional Management

This dimension involves attempts to *directly* alter the form and frequency of emotions. It includes attempts to increase or decrease emotions by, for example, exercise, challenging aversive beliefs in order to make them more positive or accurate, building optimism, or increasing self-esteem. Three of the EI and SEL models have this as a component, usually under the label of “managing emotions,” or “thinking optimistically.”

For example, in the school-based EI intervention, teachers are encouraged to brainstorm about and record possible strategies they could implement to manage their negative emotions. Such strategies include self-talk, exercise, talking to a friend or colleague, and deep-breathing. Kornacki and Caruso’s workplace EI intervention teaches people to generate particular moods by having them think of the details of a situation that elicits the mood. Boyatzis’ managerial intervention (Chapter 2) seeks to increase emotional self-control by providing people with feedback on how they perform in emotionally difficult situations. The extent to which this kind of behavioral feedback targets frequency of emotions (e.g., does it help people to feel less anger?) versus targeting the function of that private experience (e.g., does anger no longer lead to destructive behavior?; see next section) is unknown. Ciarrochi’s mindfulness approach again takes a somewhat contrary approach on emotion management, not actively teaching self-intervention or control techniques, and in many circumstances actively discouraging it (see the sections on emotional orientation and defusion below).

More General Positive Personality Change

Emotional skills develop in the context of a personality more generally. Much of what has been examined thus far concerns a person’s development of emotional responding and knowledge. Yet most of the applied practices here include techniques that influence personality beyond its specifically emotional functioning. We view that as an advantage because no part of an individual’s psychology operates in isolation. Here we continue the discussion with an examination of techniques that influence

other parts of personality. What all these techniques have in common is that they are designed to promote personal development, often with a focus on effective behavior and life strategies.

Techniques that Promote Effective Emotional Orientation

Effective emotional orientation involves the extent to which people are willing to experience unpleasant emotions and emotionally charged thoughts and images, if doing so will help them to move in a valued direction (see Chapter 4 for more detail). "Being willing" means having emotions, without trying to change them, even when they are extremely unpleasant, and even when they are leading to unhelpful cognitive biases. Ineffective emotional orientation involves the tendency to change or chronically suppress unpleasant private experience in a way that interferes with valued living. For example, people with post-traumatic stress disorder will frequently go to great lengths to avoid situations that elicit their traumatic memory. Consequently, they may avoid people and places that are important to them, even though such avoidance does not eliminate the distressing memories and may even make them worse.⁶

Effective emotional orientation is a central process targeted in Ciarrochi's MBEIT, with about 25% of the intervention spent on this. For example, one exercise involves having people list all the strategies that they have used to change distress. Then, they are asked to reflect on the extent that the strategies work, i.e., that they are successfully able to eliminate distress. A frequent outcome of this exercise is that people come to recognize that they have been trying for years, without success, to get rid of their distress. They come to recognize the hopelessness of the emotional control agenda. Ideally, they also start to see that letting go of control can free up energy to commit to valued living (e.g., you do not have to wait till you make yourself feel confident in order to get started on a valued activity).

Effective orientation is undoubtedly targeted to some extent by the other interventions as well. For example, the school-based and workplace EI interventions support the importance of emotion by teaching that it conveys valuable information. Whilst Ciarrochi and his colleagues (MBEIT, Chapter 4) consider emotional orientation to be distinct from emotion management, and even opposed to it, other researchers may consider orientation to be a part of emotion management. For example, they may teach effective emotional orientation, with the goal of reducing negative affect (emotion management).

Techniques that Promote Defusion

Defusion was described in the MBEIT chapter. It involves skills that help one to undermine the unhelpful function of emotions and thoughts. For example, in a fused context, if someone says, "You are stupid," you may feel emotional pain and decide not to engage in an intelligent behavior. Thus, "you are stupid" has a controlling role over behavior. In a defused context, in contrast, the same verbal sequence can be experienced as sounds, as a foreign language, and consequently has little or no impact on your feelings or behavior. In general, thoughts and feelings do not have to be viewed as causes for other behaviors, and therefore do not have to be eliminated to effect a change in overt behavior.⁶ Rather, one can manipulate the context in which thoughts and emotions occur, so that they no longer have an unhelpful controlling role over behavior.

Ciarrochi's MBEIT teaches people a variety of skills designed to help them defuse from unhelpful emotions and thoughts. The most prominent techniques involve increased mindfulness skills, or the ability of people to take a non-judgmental, observer perspective on their thoughts and feelings. This perspective is hypothesized to help people to experience thoughts and feelings for what they are, fleeting sounds and sensations, and not what they seem to be, e.g., dangers or facts that must dictate behavior. For example, a client may be instructed to mindfully observe her feelings of anxiety and her evaluations, such as "I'm not good enough." She learns to let the anxiety and evaluations come and go, without taking them too seriously, and without allowing the anxiety to dictate her behavior.

MBEIT focuses on defusion perhaps more than any other program.⁶ Other approaches probably also target defusion. Essentially, any intervention that helps people to act effectively, when they are feeling a disturbing thought, is targeting the unhelpful functions of that thought (i.e., is targeting defusion). For example, the interventions in this book are likely to help people to act effectively, even when they are feeling angry.

The critical distinction between the MBEIT and the other approaches is that MBEIT centrally focuses on the acceptance of emotions and discourages attempts to change them. Thus, defusion is not used to control feelings. It is specifically about helping people to act better, even when they are experiencing strong emotions. Clients do not learn to alter the frequency of negative emotions or the content of the emotions (e.g., by positive self-talk or engaging in deep breathing). They learn to fully experience distressing emotions *and* to act effectively.

Techniques that Involve Value Clarification

Values can be defined as “verbally construed global life consequences”.⁶ (p. 206) They allow one to represent long-term life directions, stay committed to those long-term directions, and resist more immediate impulses. In Ciarrochi’s MBEIT program, values are central to the ability to engage in emotionally intelligent behavior and effective behavior more generally. Values serve as a compass during emotionally difficult times, allowing you to behave effectively, even if emotions try to “push” you in an opposite direction. For example, if you value good relations with people, then you can act in a way that facilitates this value (i.e., compromise if needed), even when angry.

Value clarification is a strong component of Ciarrochi’s MBEIT (Chapter 4) and Boyatzis’ managerial emotional competence intervention (Chapter 2). It is understandably less directly targeted by the workplace and school-based EI interventions as these focus more specifically on emotional learning. However, these interventions may indirectly increase value clarity, by getting people to focus on the utility of behaviors (e.g., by asking, “is this behavior taking you where you want to go?”).

Techniques that Increase Ethical, Prosocial Behavior

Another class of interventions in these programs seeks to alter people’s values to make them more pro-social or ethical. Such interventions are a common component of SEL programs more generally⁵ but appear to be relatively de-emphasized in the chapters in this book. Examples include interventions that encourage people to experience empathy, to engage in safe, legal, and/or ethical behaviors, to respect others, and to appreciate diversity.⁵ Ciarrochi’s MBEIT and Boyatzis’ managerial competence programs allow people to identify and clarify their own values, and appear to minimize manipulations that alter the content of values. Research is needed to evaluate the extent that direct attempts to increase pro-social values actually result in more pro-social behaviors. The success of SEL programs in promoting more pro-social behaviors may be due to any one of many components that are in the SEL program.⁷

Techniques that Increase the Amount of Accuracy and Self-Feedback

This type of intervention teaches people to engage in life experiments and to set up situations where they can receive experiential feedback on the effectiveness of their behavior. The Boyatzis managerial intervention presents the clearest example of this ingredient. It actively encourages

people to discover new behaviors, thoughts, and feelings via life experiments. MBEIT also emphasizes utilizing experience to guide behavior, rather than relying excessively on verbally generated rules and evaluations.

Techniques that Directly Increase Knowledge of Effective and Ineffective Behaviors

Some further interventions seek to teach people directly about what behaviors are socially effective and ineffective. For example, they may teach people how to assert themselves effectively (e.g., “focus your complaint on the behavior, rather than personality or the individual”). This component is represented in Boyatzis’ managerial intervention, which helps people to create a learning agenda that identifies skill weaknesses and ways to address them.

It is possible that both Brackett and Katulak’s school-based program and Kornacki and Caruso’s workplace EI interventions target this component to some extent. Specifically, the emotion management component of these interventions appears to target two major factors: the frequency or intensity of certain emotions, and the occurrence of emotionally driven, unhelpful behaviors. In carrying out such teaching, it may implicitly communicate what sorts of emotionally charged behaviors are and are not likely to be effective.

Research Evidence Related to Intervention Processes

The majority of research has evaluated entire intervention packages, and has not sought to separately evaluate the change techniques and more general educational processes of the package. The individual chapters in this book have presented evidence that supports the utility of the respective intervention package, and this evidence will not be repeated here. Below, we describe, in a brief, non-comprehensive fashion, a few pieces of evidence that exist – and indicate some research that may be needed – in support of the individual components in the interventions. The literature on clinical therapy techniques and outcomes is vast and the following comments are, at best, suggestive of the status of the techniques employed here.

Emotional Identification

There is substantial evidence that having difficulty identifying emotions is linked to poor emotional well-being and social difficulties.⁸⁻¹⁰ Experimental research is needed to examine whether interventions that focus exclusively on increasing emotion identification skills lead to actual increases in emotion identification and to improvements in social and emotional well-being.

Emotion Management

There is evidence for the benefits of teaching emotion management strategies, such as deep breathing, cognitive restructuring, and reframing.¹¹ For example, traditional cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) teaches one to challenge unhelpful thoughts (e.g., "I am worthless"), and replace these thoughts with more helpful thoughts (e.g., "I am a person of worth"), in order to reduce anxiety, depression, and anger. CBT packages have found substantial empirical support.¹¹ However, these packages typically involve many ingredients in addition to emotion management (e.g., behavioral activation; exposure; the therapeutic relationship). It is always possible that one of these other ingredients is responsible for the beneficial effects. For example, Jacobsen and his colleagues have shown that one can eliminate the cognitive structuring component of CBT interventions and still show improvements in emotional functioning.¹² This study does not refute the value of cognitive restructuring. Rather, it casts doubt on whether such a component is *necessary* for improvement. Future research is needed to evaluate the extent that emotion management interventions like cognitive restructuring are both effective and necessary.

Defusion

As conceptualized in Ciarrochi's MBEIT, defusion interventions seek to change the unhelpful function of emotions and thoughts, rather than changing the form of these private experiences (as happens with emotion management interventions). Some research suggests that intervention that focuses exclusively on defusion can be effective.¹³ However, most of the research involving defusion has evaluated defusion in a much larger intervention package, which involved many intervention ingredients.¹⁴ Future research is needed to evaluate the extent that defusion, by itself, is effective.

Emotional Orientation

As reviewed in the chapter on MBET, there is clear evidence that effective emotional orientation is related to positive social and emotional well-being outcomes. In addition, there is reasonable evidence that interventions can increase emotional orientation, and that such increases lead to improvements in emotional well-being.^{6,15}

Exposure is one of the most empirically supported interventions in clinical psychology and is likely to increase effective emotional orientation.¹⁶ Exposure involves presenting a client with anxiety-producing material (or other distressing material) for sufficient duration or frequency so as to decrease the intensity of their emotional reaction. Exposure may help people to learn the benefit of facing fears, rather than avoiding them.

Values and Behavioral Activation

Research suggests that happier people tend to hold values for intrinsic rather than extrinsic reasons, tend to engage in valued behavior that is challenging but not “too” challenging, and tend to successfully commit to and put values into play.^{17,18} Other research suggests that getting people to engage in enjoyable activities leads to decreases in depression.¹² Additional research is needed to evaluate whether value clarification, by itself, is an active ingredient in interventions.

Utilization and Understanding Emotions

The key components of Mayer and Salovey’s ability model include emotion identification and management (already described), and emotion utilization and understanding.¹⁹ Brackett and Katulak and Kornacki and Caruso described interventions designed to target all of these components. Outcome research is presented in both chapters, and appears promising, but further outcome research focused on these specific techniques would be of interest.

Conclusions

It is clear that the different intervention packages have ingredients that help people. Prior research in psychotherapeutic techniques, coupled with program-specific research evidence presented in this book, suggests that social and emotional learning programs can improve emotional well-being, social effectiveness, social connectedness, and managerial effectiveness. That said, it is not yet clear which ingredients are most

essential, which ingredients are inactive or even harmful, and which ingredients are not yet sufficiently included in each intervention. This criticism could, of course, be leveled at most psychological intervention programs. Despite considerable advances in outcome research, much needs to be done. Future research will need to evaluate the efficacy of different ingredients, compared to a placebo condition. This will allow us to gradually build up a set of empirically supported processes that help to reduce human suffering and improve effectiveness.

That said, the programs described here are among the best we have seen in the field. They are theoretically coherent, carefully designed, and follow best practices as presently understood. They appear to be well-accepted by those who have gone through them, and rated as useful. They represent, in other words, some innovative and promising interventions for emotional and personality growth.

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