THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF THE HR SECTOR
2007-2015

Emotional Intelligence in Business
“Emotional Intelligence is how somebody manages their personality to be both personally and interpersonally effective.”

— JCA Global
Overview

This paper analyses data on individuals working in the Human Resources (HR) sector* who completed the Emotional Intelligence Profile (EIP), an online self-report questionnaire, from 2007-15.

The results show the HR sector to be somewhat higher in Emotional Intelligence (EI) than most other job sectors; in particular they score strongly on interpersonal aspects of EI such as valuing others, empathy, and connecting with others. However, alongside this strength is a tendency for this sector to be more submissive or benevolent, have lower self-confidence, be less assertive and over-trusting. This may impact on the HR sector’s capacity for progressing to senior leadership roles that expand their strategic influence within organisations. For example, research shows that the HR sector has a strong appreciation for the benefit that EI can bring to organisations (90% respondents), yet has had far less success at including EI within their organisations’ development programmes (30% respondents).

Since a peak in 2012, the HR sector’s EI scores have dropped significantly. This is a worrying trend that may indicate lowering morale and engagement, which may be the result of substantial changes and size reduction for HR departments in recent years. It may be seen as incumbent upon HR professionals to practice what they preach and to demonstrate the highest standards of EI in their own personal development. If the HR sector is to become consistently strong and less susceptible to the ups and downs of organisational change, it must not only be good at the softer interpersonal aspects, but also the harder self-management components of Emotional Intelligence.

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* The sample consisted of 2,196 individuals from the HR sector, their composition being; two thirds female, average age 35-45, mostly middle to senior managerial level, 60% UK origin, working in both the public and private sectors. The comparison group were 24,142 individuals from various job sectors typically at senior managerial level.
How emotionally intelligent is the HR sector?

In comparison with over 24,000 respondents from other job sectors Human Resources (HR) scored somewhat higher than average on Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Table 1). As the second highest-scoring sector, they outperformed sales, health and professional services; all typically seen as people oriented professions. This higher score may be due to the fact that the HR sector is very aware of the importance of personal development and therefore invests more time into their own self development (page 7). Another hypothesis is that HR attracts people who are stronger in EI, as they already appreciate the value that Human Resources can bring to organisations.

The only group to outperform HR is the self-employed group. They tend to score higher in areas to do with self-confidence (such as Personal Power and Independence). This may indicate that HR could afford to be more ‘single-minded’ on occasions, or have more courage in their convictions.

Table 2 shows that on the six main components of EI,* the HR sector are strong on all three Interpersonal areas. In particular, they score high on relationship scales,** such as Regard for Others, Awareness of Others, Connecting with Others and Emotional Expression and Control. This suggests that they are good at understanding others, building strong relationships and communicating effectively, all essential qualities in HR professionals. They also score high in areas to do with personal development, such as Self Awareness and Reflective Learning.

* An overview of EI and the EI framework is described in Appendix 1.
** Scale definitions are given in Appendix 2.
Some EI scales demonstrate potential development areas, pointing towards being less self-assured, more benevolent and tending to follow rather than lead. Specifically these include: lower **Self Regard**, less **Emotionally Resilient**, less **Goal Directed**, more **Dependent** and **Over-Trust** compared to the general population. These results suggest the need for HR to be more assertive if they are to develop their influence and impact within organisations.

The two scales that underpin all other scales are **Self Regard** and **Regard for Others**. When placed in a 2 x 2 matrix they represent four core attitudes or ‘Life positions’ (Ernst, 1971) that greatly influence a person’s feelings, behaviour, motivation and performance. Based on this analysis the HR sector fall slightly into the top left ‘Submissive’ position, where **Self Regard** is lower than **Regard for Others** – shown by the blue ball (Table 3). This suggests that, under stress, individuals may tend to become self-blaming and negative towards themselves, be less confident and focus less on their own needs. The risk here is that the HR sector becomes too subservient and lacks leadership.
What differences are there within the HR sector?

Further analysis was conducted to examine differences in age, gender and job level within the HR sector. With age, there was a consistent increase in overall EI for each age band (Table 4). This may be expected as EI has close similarities with the concept of ‘wisdom’, defined as ‘the effective application of knowledge and experience’ (Oxford). Ideally, organisations will learn to embrace the experience of an ageing workforce, as these individuals are likely to provide sound guidance and act as role models to others. Only one scale, Connecting with Others, decreased with age, which may reflect less of a desire to fit in or need to be accepted. Other findings showed that there was a noticeable overall increase in EI for the 30-39 age group, which may correspond with increased responsibility both at work and in family life.

![TABLE 4](image)

There were some clear differences between the male and female respondents (Table 5). This may indicate that the HR sector is less appealing to males; a possible reason for this may be a perception that there is less opportunity for career development and senior management (Murphy, 2014).

The concern therefore, is that this sector does not attract some of the typical male strengths of EI. Males tend to score higher in areas related to self-confidence such as Self Regard, Emotional Resilience, Flexibility and Assertiveness. Females score higher in domains such as Self Awareness, Awareness of Others and Connecting with Others. Therefore, as there were three times more females than males in our sample, the HR sector presented as very strong in aspects of awareness and Interpersonal Intelligence with the development areas landing in the Personal Intelligence area.
Overall, EI increased consistently with seniority of job level (Table 6). The difference between levels is quite considerable, indicating that HR professionals develop greatly in all aspects of EI throughout their career. A key differentiator between senior and lower levels is higher Emotional Resilience, indicating that dealing with set-backs and coping with adversity is an important attribute for senior HR employees. A key notable strength that becomes apparent for Directors is having higher Self Regard. This may indicate that operating at the most senior levels within organisations requires strong self-belief and inner-confidence. The result of this is that they are more likely to deal well with pressure, be less defensive and be more consistent in their behaviour.

It is interesting to note that in a recent survey (CIPD 2014-15), seven out of ten HR Directors previously worked in roles outside of HR. It may be that wider business experience is an important factor in helping to develop EI and self-assuredness in the organisation and as part of their career progression (Murphy, 2014).
Despite the HR sector scoring higher than most other job sectors in EI over the last nine years, there has been a rapid decline in EI since its peak in 2012, dropping below the average for all job sectors in 2015. (Table 7)

This is a worrying trend, as a drop in EI is often associated with lower morale and disengagement. This may be due to significant changes taking place over the last few years in the HR sector. For example, 50% of HR departments have gone through structural changes in the last two years and 49% of the HR public sector has reduced in size (CIPD 2014-15). Inevitably, these changes will require greater capacity to manage workload and cope with uncertainty which will demand greater EI in areas such as Emotional Resilience, Goal Directedness and Personal Power. It has also been commented that many HR functions have become more transactional as ‘Personnel’ functions, which do not require the same levels of sophistication or EI (HR Magazine, 2014).

A further explanation for lower EI and possibly lower morale is the ‘double whammy’ effect of the 2007 economic recession on HR. Not only did HR have to make redundancies but they would then have been subjected to it themselves also. The economic recession initially hit the private sector and banking industries in 2007-8, but it was a few years later when this filtered into reduced budgets and redundancies elsewhere. These have been challenging times for the HR sector and has required robustness in coping with the emotional consequences, drawing upon EI attributes such as Self Regard, Emotional Resilience, Realistic Optimism and Assertiveness. It is an indication that the state of the financial economy is closely related to the state of the human ‘emotional economy’, such that higher well-being improves productivity and that organisational success improves employee engagement (Gallup, 2010).
Are organisations making the best use of Emotional Intelligence?

In 2014 JCA Global Ltd conducted a survey of HR managers’ perceptions of EI across 50 public and private sector organisations within the UK.

TABLE 8
What percentage of respondents said they know about and understand EI?

95% UNDERSTAND EI
5% LITTLE OR NO KNOWLEDGE OF EI

TABLE 9
How important is EI to organisations?

TABLE 10
To what extent is EI being applied within organisations?

5% DEDICATED EI DEVELOPMENT
25% SOME EI DEVELOPMENT
70% NO EI DEVELOPMENT
These results show that about 90% of respondents see EI as very important or crucial to individual and organisational performance (Table 9). Yet, only 30% of these organisations are including EI within their development or selection processes (Table 10).

It may be inferred from these and other findings in this survey that:

— Senior management do not fully recognise the value of EI
— HR does not have sufficient influence to implement EI
— EI development is not given adequate priority in these organisations.

There is wider evidence to support the case for increased application of EI in organisations. The latest HR CIPD Outlook survey (2014-15) found that the top rated priorities for HR functions with about a quarter of respondents were:

1 Employee engagement
2 Managing change
3 Managing performance
4 Leadership development

Each of these criteria have been shown to correlate with higher EI (O’Boyle, 2011). Research by JCA Global Ltd found that the emotional climate created by the leaders of an organisation accounts for a 22% variance in the performance, engagement and well-being of its employees (Maddocks, 2014). ‘Leadership development’ for example, requires several EI attributes such as: Awareness of Others and Connecting with Others to be of influence, Assertiveness and Personal Power for courageous leadership and Authenticity to build trust, loyalty and credibility.

As well as implementing EI within the organisation, HR professionals would benefit greatly from developing their own EI leadership in the areas previously identified. Evidence has shown that higher levels of individual EI in HR professionals translates into more effective leadership (Alston, 2010).
Appendix 1
What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence is a combination of skills, attitudes and habits that distinguish superior performance from ‘run-of-the-mill’, both in life as a whole and at work. The different parts of EI are brought together and organised by the EI framework shown below. This consists of two streams:

Personal Intelligence
The individual being intelligent in picking up what is going on inside themselves (Self Awareness) and acting on these feelings and notions (Self Management). This includes aspects such as: self-motivation, dealing with challenges and setbacks, being confident in decisions and actions and adapting to new situations.

Interpersonal Intelligence
The individual being intelligent in picking up what is going on for other people and between people (Awareness of Others) and doing what they need to do to manage this (Relationship Management). This includes aspects such as: building trusting relationships, leading and managing others, helping motivate others, team working, coaching people and managing confrontation.

There are three levels to the EI framework; at the deepest level Emotional Intelligence is influenced by the individual’s Attitude, in particular their attitude towards themselves (Self Regard) and their attitude towards other people (Regard for Others). This in turn influences Feeling (Self Awareness and Awareness of Others), which manifests in their Behaviour (Self Management and Relationship Management).

The relationship between the six parts of Emotional Intelligence is shown in the EI framework below:

For a comprehensive description of EI and its development refer to Emotional Intelligence @ Work (Maddocks 2014).
Appendix 2

Scale definitions for the EIP

Attitude scales
- **Self Regard** is the degree to which you accept and value yourself.
- **Regard for Others** is the degree to which you accept and value others as people, as distinct from liking or approving of what they may do.

Feeling scales
- **Self Awareness** is the degree to which you are in touch with your body, your feelings and your intuitions.
- **Awareness of Others** is the degree to which you are in touch with the feeling states of others.

Behaviour scales (Self Management)
- **Emotional Resilience** is the degree to which you are able to pick yourself up and bounce back when things go badly for you.
- **Personal Power** is the degree to which you believe that you are in charge of and take responsibility for your outcomes in life, rather than seeing yourself as the victim of circumstances and/or of other people.
- **Goal Directedness** is the degree to which your behaviour is related to your own long-term goals.
- **Flexibility** is the degree to which you feel free to adapt your thinking and your behaviour to match the changing situations of life.
- **Connecting with Others** is the extent and ease with which you are able to make significant connections with other people by sharing yourself with them.
- **Authenticity** is the degree to which you invite the trust of others by being principled, reliable, consistent and known.

Behaviour scales (Relationship Management)
- **Trust** measures your tendency to trust others. A high score suggests a healthy balance – you are disposed to trust others, but careful to take care of yourself in relation to others.
- **Balanced Outlook** is how well you manage to balance optimism and realism. A high score means that you have a healthy balance; you tend towards optimism, but are sure to check out your hopes against reality.
Emotional Expression and Control is how emotionally controlled you are. A high score means that you have a healthy balance – you are free to express your feelings, but are in control of whether to, how to and when to do so.

Conflict Handling is how well you handle conflict; how assertive you are. A high score suggests a healthy balance – you are assertive, standing up for your wants and needs, but staying calm and respecting others while doing so.

Interdependence is how well you manage to balance taking yourself and taking others into account. A high score means that you have a healthy balance; you tend towards working with people but still retain a degree of independence.
References


