

Increase emotional intelligence to enhance decision making



Too often, when making decisions at work, we are influenced by emotions that are usually unrelated to the decision being made. For example, the drive to work is highly frustrating and emotions felt during traffic influence decisions made when arriving at work.

Researchers from the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto conducted a study, that was subsequently published in the journal *Psychological Science*. The aim of the research was to investigate how different levels of emotional intelligence influence decision-making.

Half of a group of volunteers were made anxious, by asking them to give a presentation before completing an unrelated gambling task in which they could choose a high-risk option for a high reward or a safe option for a low reward. Those who were low in emotional intelligence and who were made anxious were much more likely to go for the safe option than those who were high in emotional intelligence. This is because they were unable to attribute their anxious feeling to the presentation they had just given and instead attributed it to the task at hand meaning they went for the safe option.

However, when the researchers told the volunteers that they may be feeling anxious because of the presentations, they were no more or less likely to choose the safe option than other participants. The findings suggested that emotional intelligence can likely help stop any emotions, both negative and positive, from influencing unrelated decisions. People who are emotionally intelligent do not remove all emotions from their decision-making, however *they remove emotions that have nothing to do with the decision*.

According to Daniel Goleman, an Emotional Intelligence expert, Emotional Intelligence can be defined as the ability to identify, assess, and control one's own emotions, the emotions of others, and that of groups. Emotions give us the tools we need to interact and develop meaningful relationships with others, and our ability to understand and manage them.

People who are emotionally intelligent are self-aware and intuitive to others. They can effectively manage their relationships with people and importantly, they have a healthy relationship with themselves. Great decision-makers have the ability to empathise with others and are effective communicators.

Successful decision-makers do not dismiss their emotion (or gut-feeling), they allow themselves to experience it so that they can remove the emotions that have nothing to do with the decision. It is easy to see the flaws of others, but the most successful decision-makers can identify their own emotional triggers and work past them.

Harvard Business School professor and behavioural author Francesca Gino calls this checking your "emotional temperature". Gino suggests that when you're in a situation where you feel yourself getting highly emotional (positively or negatively), you should ask yourself questions in the moment of the decision, such as 'Does this fit in with my original objectives?', 'Am I reacting to social/ organisational pressures?' Gino also recommends taking a short break from that situation. Those few minutes where you allow yourself to process the information and identify your own emotional state could save you from making decisions that you later regret.

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