

Team Emotional Intelligence: What It Can Mean and How It Can Affect Performance

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We are only just beginning to understand the consequences of emotional intelligence (EI) for work groups in organizational settings. High among the benefits emphasized for emotionally intelligent individuals has been greater effectiveness in working together with colleagues. Thus, EI could be a crucial component of high-functioning teamwork. However, little academic research has examined the impact that EI can make for teams. The goal of this chapter is to review evidence documenting that the emotional intelligence of teams is a substantial predictor of effective team performance.

I begin by emphasizing that there are two very different ways of thinking about the EI of teams: first, by examining the EI of the individual members on the team, and second, by examining how much emotional intelligence team members display in their interactions with each other. These perspectives do not compete with each other. Rather, both are valuable, and each provides different insights and opportunities for both researchers and practitioners. After briefly outlining these two perspectives, I describe the design of a recent study that provides data relevant to each perspective. Then, I review in greater detail the evidence for emotional intelligence as an important predictor of team effectiveness.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “TEAM EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE”?

What does it mean for a work group to be emotionally intelligent? There is more than one way to think about the emotional intelligence of groups. This chapter reviews the two main perspectives addressing this question. First, we

can consider the emotional intelligence of the individual members of the team. A team may be more effective if its members have greater emotional intelligence, which is an *individual resource* that each person can use in his or her work. Second, we can consider the degree of emotional intelligence that team members appear to use when they interact with each other. It is reasonable to expect an emotionally intelligent team to have healthy and effective emotional dynamics and to use emotion productively to conduct their work with each other. Instead of considering EI as an individual resource that members can use, the second method looks at emotional intelligence as a set of norms or patterns about the way people behave with each other.

Although these two perspectives may at first seem very similar, there can be important differences. Many of us have worked on teams in which the whole was more—or less—than the sum of its parts. A team with emotionally average members might have a spark that ignites them toward exceptional sensitivity and adeptness in how they relate to each other. Members of some teams just “get” each other—sometimes after working together extensively or perhaps after a shared experience, and sometimes right from the start. Conversely, some teams fall short of their promise, when individuals who are normally quite effective on their own appear to be “off” when they work with each other.

The major difference between the two perspectives is the focus on the resources that a team has versus the style of interacting that a team uses. In the first perspective, examining the EI of individual team members allows us to understand the individual emotional resources that members have available for teamwork—that is, the sum of the parts. By contrast, in the second perspective, examining how teams actually use their emotional skills when working together allows us to understand the dynamics of a work group—that is, the “whole” or the team emotional intelligence that may or may not be the same as the sum of its parts.

These two perspectives complement each other rather than compete with each other. Figure 8.1 summarizes the perspectives, with detail to be filled in over the course of this chapter, and highlights how they each ask very different questions about teams. Before presenting the research evidence that team EI predicts greater effectiveness, I first describe the design of a recent study conducted to examine both perspectives on what it means to study emotional intelligence in teams.

DATA LINKING TEAM EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS

For these two perspectives on group emotional intelligence, I next discuss relevant examples of previous research. Recent work has documented links between effective teamwork and team emotional intelligence as measured

<u>Perspective</u>	<u>Insights</u>
I. EI of individuals in the team <i>Examining the individuals who make up the team</i>	
Team-level average EI	Does this team generally have the emotional resources to be productive?
Team-level minimum EI	Does this team have anyone left behind?
Team-level maximum EI	Does this team have a member who could jumpstart emotional effectiveness?
Team-level diversity of EI	Does this team have members who speak the same "emotional language"?
II. "Team EI" <i>A team as more than the sum of its parts</i>	
Observational and self-report measures of the emotional savvy in interactions among team members	Does this team use emotion effectively in its work?

FIG. 8.1. Perspectives on emotional intelligence in teams.

by both perspectives. To compare and contrast the perspectives more directly, I highlight data from a new multimethod longitudinal study that I conducted along with colleagues Nalini Ambady from the Department of Psychology at Harvard and Jeff Polzer from the Harvard Business School. This is the first project to examine group EI using both perspectives—examining the EI that individuals have and also the EI that team members use with each other. This study demonstrates that groups' emotional intelligence is an important predictor of a range of team-level performance measures, including ratings by senior staff members, retention, and self-reported outcomes such as performance, liking of colleagues, and team learning.

Why Examine Accuracy in Communicating Emotion?

In the longitudinal study that I discuss next, the particular aspect of emotional intelligence that I examined was accuracy in the communication of emotion. That is, to what extent can team members understand their colleagues' emotional expressions? Likewise, to what extent can team members express their own emotions clearly? At first this skill may seem out of place in a business setting, but in fact we use it continually to get our work done. For example, a supervisor might believe that an employee has just

made an excellent presentation. In that case, does the employee correctly perceive the supervisor's positive reaction to the presentation—or, instead, is the employee uncertain what the supervisor thinks, or perhaps does the employee even believe that the supervisor did not like the presentation at all? In this example, note that the emotional content is related directly to the work itself, where the employee needs to understand the supervisor's emotional reaction as a form of feedback.

The longitudinal study focused on emotional communication skill for three reasons. First, the ability to use emotion as a channel of communication is a core component of emotional intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Mayer, DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990), and so far some of the best scientific evidence for the importance of EI in the workplace has come from the positive relation between job performance and emotion recognition accuracy (Elfenbein, Marsh, & Ambady, 2002). For example, in one study, business executives and Foreign Service officers who were better at identifying the emotional content expressed in voice samples and video clips also achieved greater performance ratings and were promoted to higher level positions (Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979). This is because we need to be able to judge our colleagues' reactions, intentions, preferences, and likely future behaviors to work productively with them.

The second reason to focus on the effective use of emotion as a communication tool is that, among the various components of EI, it is one of the most inherently social aspects. Communication—unlike emotion regulation, for example—simply cannot occur alone. Thus, it is particularly relevant to teams.

The third reason for focusing on the communication of emotion is that it has the most valid, reliable, and sophisticated set of measurements available within the field of emotional intelligence. When a new area fascinates researchers and managers, it can take many years to reach the level of scientific standards associated with psychological research. However, the communication of emotion has been a topic of scientific study for several decades. During that time, researchers have validated methods for measuring how accurate communication is—using judgments of photographs, audio recordings of the voice, and video recordings of body movement. These types of measures are more valid and reliable than self-report and written test measures (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000; Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998; Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001). Self-report measures are often limited because, even when people try to describe themselves honestly, they can vary greatly in how much self-awareness they have about their own emotional skills. Pencil-and-paper performance questions (Mayer et al., 1999) that have a “correct” answer are also limited because it can be

challenging to capture accurately in words the richness of emotional intelligence. By contrast, 360° performance appraisals can be extremely valuable when the appraisers have had extensive contact and experience with the person they are rating. However, these methods are also vulnerable to rating bias and subjectivity and are less applicable for initial screening and hiring. Despite these challenges, I am optimistic that further developments within the field will enable the measurement of other components of EI to catch up with the several decades "head start" for psychologists studying the communication of emotion.

A Study of Group Emotional Intelligence in Teams

To examine the effects of team-level emotional intelligence, my colleagues Nalini Ambady, Jeff Polzer, and I recently conducted a large-scale longitudinal study of work groups (for more detail, see Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Elfenbein, Polzer, & Ambady, 2004). Participants were members of a non-profit public service organization based in a medium-sized city in the northeastern United States. The organization is part of the national service program AmeriCorps, which serves as the domestic version of the United States Peace Corps, providing community service in underprivileged neighborhoods. Team members were young adults between 17 and 23 years of age serving as full-time employees for one academic year. Members worked in teams to perform a variety of public service jobs such as serving as assistant teachers, after-school and day-camp counselors, disaster relief workers, assistants to local community charities, and in many other public service roles working mostly with "at-risk" societal groups. The organization paid them modest compensation and benefits in addition to university scholarships if they completed the challenging year-long program.

This organization was an ideal environment in which to study emotional intelligence in teams. First, the organizational design made it easy to study teams over time, beginning when they were first formed. The groups conducted all of their work in teams, with 16 teams total and five to six active members each. Teammates were unacquainted before the program began. Senior staff members determined team composition using a random assignment process that maximized the demographic diversity of team members. Second, members conducted difficult work that made emotional skills an important ingredient for their individual and team effectiveness. The organization is demographically diverse, including a wide range of ethnic and educational backgrounds.

Participants completed a range of measures associated with the different perspectives on emotional intelligence in teams. Next I describe the specific measures as well as the results.

TWO MODELS OF "TEAM EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE"

The two methods to conceptualize emotional intelligence in groups each provide a valuable—yet distinct—perspective. In this section, I review the underpinnings and evidence for thinking about team EI both in terms of the EI that individual members have and also in terms of the degree of emotional intelligence that team members appear to use when they interact with each other.

Emotional Intelligence of Individual Group Members

Because we know that emotional intelligence has important consequences for individuals in the workplace, we suspect—but do not necessarily know—that the emotional intelligence of individual members should also have consequences for teams. Indeed, researchers often find it valuable to think about work groups in terms of the individuals who are in the group. Emotional tendencies can be considered as individual traits, and these traits of individuals combine and create the emotional composition of a group (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). The emotional composition of a team not only involves the average value for each team member but also includes the maximum value, the minimum value, and the diversity in values across teammates, each of which I discuss here.

Group-Level Average of Emotional Intelligence. The most common method of thinking about a psychological phenomenon at the team level is to take an average value, which "aggregates" individual-level scores into a single score for the group. The underlying assumption is that emotional intelligence can be viewed a resource that team members draw on and that members of the team can pool their abilities to share and compensate for one another. Thus, a higher average level of EI among the individuals in a team provides a benefit to the team's performance.

Before I go into the research evidence showing that teams with higher average EI outperform teams with lower average EI, it is worth taking a brief detour to address an academic debate about whether it is meaningful to use an average value across individuals to describe a team as a whole. Scholars have debated extensively about whether it is necessary first to demonstrate that there is a high degree of similarity among team members before calculating an average value (e.g., Chan, 1998; Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994; Rousseau, 1985). In the case of emotional intelligence, I argue that this requirement does not apply. Demonstrating similarity can be a worthwhile safeguard when examining psychological phenomena such as attitudes or

group culture, because it is difficult to say that group attitudes or cultures exist if colleagues cannot agree upon them. However, emotional intelligence is different in the sense that it can be viewed as a kind of individual resource. This analogy makes it clear that it is meaningful to compare teams with high versus low average values, whether or not individual team members are similar to each other in EI.

Past research has documented performance consequences for group-level averages across emotional personality traits. Jennifer George (1990) studied the emotional tendencies of individuals in teams and defined *affective tone* as consistent emotional reactions by members of a work group. She found that groups with more positive affective tone tended to have lower absenteeism, and groups with less negative tone tended to have greater helping behavior among members. Likewise, Bouchard (1969) found that group problem-solving performance was higher in groups that had more sociable members. More recently, Neuman and Wright (1999) found that teams whose members had positive, "agreeable" personalities were better able to work cooperatively toward team objectives. Their social skills allowed the team to communicate openly and to resolve conflicts and disruptions.

Although this past work documented the effects of group averages with personality traits rather than emotional intelligence, it strongly suggested that this would be a valuable method of examining team EI. Along with colleagues Jeff Polzer and Anita Williams Woolley at the Harvard Business School, I recently studied teams of MBA students participating in business plan competitions (Elfenbein, Polzer, & Woolley, 2002). The work of these teams is more than just a course project—approximately one third of the teams involved in this contest are developing their plan as the roadmap for a new business venture. At the beginning of the contest, participants completed a survey that included a long-standing test of emotion recognition called the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy (DANVA; Nowicki & Duke, 2001). They viewed a series of photographs of facial expressions, and they indicated the emotion that they thought was best represented in the photo. The photos included expressions of happiness, sadness, fear, and anger. This test has been used for nearly a decade in many dozens of studies by researchers across areas of psychology. It strongly predicts important elements of life functioning such as academic success and social adjustment among children and adolescents, and in more recent studies it has also predicted workplace success among adults. For example, Nalini Ambady and I found that individuals with higher total scores in recognizing the emotional expressions on the DANVA test also had higher performance appraisals from both supervisors and peers (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002c).

At the end of the business plan competition—but before the official contest results had been announced—participants completed another survey that included questions about the way their team had functioned during

their work together. We found that teams whose members had higher average scores on the DANVA reported that they felt greater psychological safety with each other, had lower levels of conflict, made decisions more collaboratively together, and experienced greater team learning over the course of their project. These results argue for the effectiveness of teams with individuals high in emotional intelligence.

In the large-scale longitudinal study of emotional intelligence in teams that I conducted along with Nalini Ambady and Jeff Polzer, described previously, we documented a similar pattern of findings. This replication is helpful because the two studies examined work groups in very different contexts. The members of business plan contest teams were older, they had more work experience, and they were students at a prestigious business school. Most important, they chose their own teammates. By contrast, members of the public service group were younger and less experienced, and they were full-time employees working with their teammates daily. They were randomly assigned to their teams. An additional difference is that we were able to give the public service participants a longer version of the DANVA test, which included vocal tones in addition to photographs of facial expressions.

Yet, in both cases, teams with greater average emotional intelligence also experienced better team functioning. At our public service group, these teams with high average DANVA scores reported that they had accomplished more in their work together, and they also had greater retention of their members throughout the challenging year-long program. Thus, teams with higher average levels of individual emotional intelligence appear consistently to outperform teams with lower average levels.

Group-Level Minimum and Maximum Emotional Intelligence. Although a group average is valuable as a single measure to summarize the overall emotional intelligence of a group, the average value is not the only worthwhile number. Depending on the type of group task, other values may be more appropriate to describe important features of the group. Closely related to the average value are several other mathematical functions, such as the maximum and the minimum value in a team (Barsade & Gibson, 1998).

In 1972, Steiner outlined a typology of group tasks that is helpful to consider for this purpose. The group average is most useful for examining "additive" tasks, in which each group member's contribution is added together into a common pool of output. Emotional intelligence serves as a resource for teams, and for many types of tasks it may not matter how that resource is distributed across individuals—as long as it is available for use.

By contrast, a group's maximum level of EI among individuals is useful for exploring what Steiner called "conjunctive" tasks, in which a group output represents the performance of its strongest member. For some types of

work, having one teammate with exceptionally high emotional intelligence may be sufficient to assist the entire team. For example, in a negotiation setting with multiple representatives from each party, one person who is particularly adept at sensing the interests and tone of the other party can share this information with teammates, so that the entire group can act appropriately. In other settings, it is possible for a "good-cop-bad-cop" routine to develop in which the teammate acting as a "good cop" can undo any emotional tension caused in the process of productive work by the "bad cop." In other cases, one colleague with very high EI can serve as a lightning rod to detect and dissipate tensions that can arise during a team's work.

Few researchers have examined the impact on team effectiveness of the highest level of skill among team members. In a notable exception, Williams and Sternberg (1988) conducted a study using teams of students working on difficult marketing assignments that required analysis and creativity. The researchers tested a type of social intelligence—an unwillingness to participate in socially unpleasant tasks—and found that the maximum level was highly predictive of team effectiveness. In the study of business plan competitions that I conducted with Jeff Polzer and Anita Williams Woolley, teams that had a very large maximum level did not necessarily appear to benefit from that exceptional skill of one or more individuals. These teams did report that they relied less on rules and procedures to govern their work interactions, and they were less overwhelmed by the day-to-day work in their teams. However, they reported that they had somewhat less satisfying relationships among colleagues. This suggests that individuals who were very highly skilled found it challenging to use their exceptional skill for the benefit of the whole team. Perhaps a single individual who stands out from teammates in EI has greater difficulty integrating socially with them. For the public service group that I examined with colleagues Nalini Ambady and Jeff Polzer, by contrast, no pattern appeared to emerge for the highest scores for each team.

The minimum level of EI among individuals in a group is most useful for exploring what Steiner called "disjunctive" tasks, in which a group performance is only as strong as its weakest link. In the case of emotional intelligence, this may be true for certain types of teams, for example, those that represent their organization to outside stakeholders, such as a sales team with a goal of 100% customer satisfaction. In these teams, individual behavior that is emotionally inappropriate and lacking can reflect poorly on the entire group. Barsade and Gibson (1998) also noted that the lowest value can be important if individuals may be able to infect their colleagues with their negativity.

Some evidence suggests the benefits for teams that have a high minimum level of emotional intelligence. In Williams and Sternberg's (1988) teams working on marketing problems, the minimum value of their social

intelligence measure did not predict team performance. By contrast, in our business plan study (Elfenbein, Polzer, & Woolley, 2002), it appeared that there was a large benefit for teams that had a high minimum score. These are teams in which no one is left behind, in which each member has a relatively strong level of emotion recognition. In these teams, the minimum standard was high, and the benefit to team performance for having a high minimum standard was even greater than the benefit of having a high average level. Similarly, in the longitudinal study of our public service group, groups with a higher minimum level of emotion recognition skill reported a somewhat greater sense that they accomplished their goals, although this effect was relatively small.

In summary, the research findings demonstrate that a high average level of individual emotional intelligence of team members predicts stronger team performance. Teams also appeared to benefit from having a high minimum standard of EI across individuals. However, teams did not necessarily appear to benefit from the exceptionally high skill of any one individual. The research results regarding minimum and maximum skill levels appear to be promising but showed some inconsistencies across studies that suggest a degree of caution in interpreting the findings. However, the results for high average levels of emotional intelligence were consistent and robust.

Group-Level Diversity in Emotional Intelligence. An additional way to examine EI at the team level is to consider the amount of diversity, or variability, across individual scores in a group. The underlying assumption is that emotional intelligence can also be viewed as a trait and that members of the team who are similar may fit together more smoothly and may be better able to coordinate their activities.

This perspective draws on research examining diversity in terms of personality traits, workplace goals and values, demographic characteristics, and functional background and training—which shows that diversity provides helpful perspectives but unfortunately can be accompanied by greater challenges as well. Whether team diversity helps or hinders team performance depends on the type of diversity as well as the context and environment of the work group. Although diversity along dimensions such as personality and technical skills can be beneficial, diversity along demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and gender is often associated with poorer group functioning and performance (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998).

In general, one would expect that greater similarity in emotional intelligence among team members could benefit team performance. Psychologists frequently find that people show favoritism toward others who they believe are similar to themselves (Byrne, 1971). Barsade and Gibson (1998) applied this finding specifically to similarity along emotional characteris-

tics. Thus, they argued that individuals may work better with colleagues who share their own emotional styles. Barsade, Ward, Turner, and Sonnenfeld (2000) recently documented evidence that emotional diversity presents a challenge for the effective functioning of top management teams. In their study of Fortune 500 companies, top management teams benefited both from higher levels of positive affect as well as from greater similarity in their emotional tendencies. Emotional similarity was associated with better financial performance of the company as well as more effective group processes. Furthermore, these two effects interacted with each other, so that the very worst performers in their study were those teams with both low average positive affect and high affective diversity.

Although emotional diversity might generally pose a challenge to effective team functioning, there may also be some contexts and environments in which emotional diversity could be valuable. Emotional diversity could help teams to succeed if it provides differences in perspective that are helpful for the team's work and if the diversity is accompanied by a supportive organizational climate that respects the differences among individuals. Particularly for personality and other social traits, teams can benefit from a mix of styles. Sometimes, having a group that is homogeneous can be "too much of a good thing." As early as the 1950s and 1960s, researchers found that participants preferred working with colleagues with complementary—rather than similar—personality traits (Haythorn, 1968; Hoffman & Maier, 1961; Rychlak, 1965). More recently, researchers have found that this is particularly true for extraversion, so that individuals benefit from having colleagues who differ from themselves (Barry & Stewart, 1997; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Steven, 2001). Although some similarity can be helpful, researchers found that it was overload to have colleagues who were all exceptionally outgoing and gregarious.

These findings, taken together, argue for the importance of examining the impact of diversity in emotional intelligence among individuals in a team. When expressing important messages, people use nonverbal methods of communicating just as much—or more—than verbal methods. Thus, the way that we use emotions in the workplace can function like a language that we speak simultaneously with our spoken language. Using this metaphor, diversity in the levels of emotional intelligence among teammates can serve as a language barrier. If some members are skilled with—and, consequently, accustomed to—using their emotions as a channel for communicating and coordinating with others, then it may be challenging for them to work with others who prefer a different method. In this case, diversity can imply that some colleagues speak one language and other colleagues speak another.

This suggests that diversity in emotional intelligence is likely to hinder team effectiveness. Indeed, recent evidence shows that this is the case. In

our survey examining Harvard Business School students writing business plans, described previously, we also examined the level of diversity in emotional intelligence. High levels of emotional diversity in the team predicted poorer team functioning. Teams with more variability in emotion recognition levels reported that they felt less psychological safety and had more conflict with their teammates, did not collaborate on decisions as well together, and experienced less team learning. This suggests that teams with diverse levels of emotional intelligence can find it more challenging to work together.

Our longitudinal study of public service teams, described earlier, also found that affective diversity presented challenges for group effectiveness. Teams with less similarity in levels of emotional intelligence reported that they had accomplished less in their work together, had lower retention through the end of the year-long program, and were rated less highly by senior staff members at the organization.

Interestingly, these trends were stronger for the section of the DANVA test of emotion recognition that included photographs of facial expressions—more so than the section using audiotapes of vocal tones. Researchers studying the communication of emotion often distinguish among the various “channels” of the body through which we express ourselves—facial expressions, vocal tones, and body movements. Among these, the face is considered the most controllable. That is, we can more easily control our own facial expressions, and we generally pay more attention to facial expressions than to other types of emotional expressions (DePaulo, 1992; Elfenbein, Marsh, & Ambady, 2002; Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Rosenthal et al., 1979). By contrast, the voice is considered the most “leaky.” That is, it is relatively more difficult to control our vocal tone, and often our true feelings can leak out through our voice. This is why some newer lie detection machines use stress analysis to examine small vocal tremors. The differences across channels of communication suggest that facial expressions are the expressions of emotion that are the most likely to be noticed, acknowledged, and discussed in a work group setting. Therefore, differences among teammates in accuracy with facial expressions would be particularly detrimental. One person may act on, and attempt to discuss, a signal that another colleague did not even notice. If some members are more sensitive than others, it can be as if they are speaking a different language. Correspondingly, in the case of our public service group, teams that were very diverse in understanding facial expressions had lower liking among colleagues, whereas teams diverse in understanding vocal tones did not have the same difficulty.

These results argue for the complexity of emotional intelligence and for the need to assess EI using a range of methods that assess multiple components. Although teams appear to experience greater functioning and effec-

tiveness when their members are highly emotionally intelligent, teams also appear to work better when members have similar levels of emotional intelligence. The detrimental effects of "affective diversity" are particularly strong for the components of emotional intelligence that are the most public and discussable among team members.

Team EI: Using Emotional Skills When Working in a Team

The evidence already reviewed focuses on the emotional intelligence of a team by examining the emotional intelligence of individual group members—their average value, their minimum value, their maximum value, or the diversity in their values. However, this is not the only way to focus on the emotional intelligence of a team, and it is not always necessary to measure the scores of individual team members. The second main perspective for examining EI at the team level is to examine the emotional savvy exhibited when the team members interact with each other. I refer to this second perspective as "team EI."

The underlying assumption of the second perspective is that emotional intelligence can be viewed as a process and that this process can differ across interaction partners. That is, one person may display more emotionally intelligent behavior when interacting with colleague A than with colleague B. A person may display more emotionally intelligent behavior in situation A than in situation B. We each have a unique emotional style, and the style we use fits better with certain people and with certain contexts than it does with others—even after accounting for the individual's general level of emotional intelligence. Thus, it can be worthwhile to examine the team-specific emotional intelligence—that is, the emotional quality of interactions in the team context. Researchers have often used this perspective by administering surveys that tap into the use of effective interpersonal processes among teammates. Researchers can also engage in participant observation and can conduct controlled exercises with intact teams. The core distinction between this perspective and the perspective used in the work with results described previously is the focus on how much emotional intelligence is displayed and actually used in the interactions among teammates—rather than the fixed individual attributes of teammates—as a predictor of team performance.

This approach to examining team EI is a natural extension to the definition of intelligence. Psychologist Robert Sternberg (1984) defined intelligence as "adaptation to, selection of, and shaping of real-world environments relevant to one's life" (p. 285). This suggests that the intelligence of a group should be the ability of that group to collaborate and work interdependently. This is the "functional intelligence of a group of people working

as a unit" (Williams & Sternberg, 1988, p. 356). By examining the group as a whole, rather than the individuals who are in it, we can gain an important perspective on what it means to be emotionally intelligent.

Previous research has validated the importance of thinking about the emotional intelligence of groups in terms of effective functioning. Vanessa Urch Druskat and colleagues (e.g., Druskat & Kayes, 1999; Druskat & Wolff, 2001) have investigated team EI in a variety of contexts. They found that many of the elements of effective emotional functioning in teams came from norms that team members developed with each other rather than from the intelligence of the particular individuals. That is, team emotional intelligence was often a matter of effective interpersonal behaviors rather than unchangeable traits. The whole was more than just an average of the parts, because teams tend to take on their own unique character. Teams acted in the most emotionally intelligent manner when they had mutual trust among members, a sense of group identity, and a sense of group efficacy. Note that these norms do not focus on soft areas such as being happy and friendly, but rather they focus on the conditions for communicating openly even under difficult circumstances. Although individuals can contribute toward building or destroying the necessary factors, it is the group as a whole that shapes norms. Druskat and Wolff found that individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence tended to be more effective at fostering healthy norms for teamwork. However, once in place these norms took on a life of their own and no longer depended on the individual group members.

Another source of evidence for the importance of examining team EI—in terms of the interactions among teammates rather than the EI of individuals in the team—comes from research on the linkage of moods among colleagues. When one person in a team experiences an emotion or mood, that person's teammates are often influenced and can take on some of that emotion or mood as well. Jennifer George's (1990) study, reviewed earlier, found evidence that colleagues tended to be consistent in describing the emotional tone of their team, which provides evidence that emotional tone is an important part of team culture, with implications for performance. Totterdell, Kellett, Teuchmann, and Briener (1998) demonstrated that individuals are influenced by the emotional tone of their teammates, and over time they tend to shift their own moods toward those of their colleagues. In a study that used naturalistic observations rather than surveys, Caroline Bartel and Richard Saavedra (2000) found further evidence that members of work groups generally converge to develop similar moods. Team members tended to develop their similar moods through a process known as "emotional contagion"—so that people who are nearby tend to "catch" the moods of others. Sigal Barsade (2002) investigated this process of emotional contagion more closely. In her research, she found that the

contagion of positive emotion led to greater team effectiveness, in the form of greater cooperation and performance as well as lower levels of conflict. Thus, the ability of team members to share positive mood with each other is a form of emotionally intelligent behavior that promotes greater team effectiveness.

Thus, there appears to be strong evidence for the importance of emotionally intelligent interactions among colleagues in predicting the success of teams. Nalini Ambady, Jeff Polzer, and I examined this issue further in our own longitudinal study of public service teams. We used an exercise that measured how accurate colleagues were in mutually understanding each other's emotional expressions. This exercise had two parts. First, I conducted a one-on-one interview with each individual joining the organization. We discussed previous occasions during which they had felt strong emotions in a workplace or school setting and in which they wanted others to know how they felt. Each participant described a separate incident each for anger, fear, amusement, happiness, and sadness. I asked them to repeat what they had said during the incident and to describe how they expressed themselves. If they had not said anything at the time of the incident, I asked them what they wish they had said or what they might have said. Although this interview was a reenactment, after participants described the incidents and the words that they had used, the interviews took on a strong emotional tone. I videotaped the interviews and edited them to create brief 5-sec video clips containing naturalistic samples of their emotional expressions. These video clips used segments with words that did not give away the emotion and did not violate the participant's privacy.

In the second stage of this exercise, colleagues viewed these video clips within 1 week of the team being formed. I created a separate cassette for each team so that they could view the video clips from each of their new colleagues. Colleagues made multiple-choice judgments regarding which emotion had been expressed in each video clip. Several additional measures served to validate this video clip exercise. At the end of this process, we had a measure of how well each team's members could understand their colleagues' workplace-relevant expressions of emotion. Note that this exercise did not merely measure the skill of individuals on the team, because it tapped into their skill in understanding their specific teammates—which we demonstrated was distinct from their general skill in understanding other people's emotions. This is because people express themselves in a range of different styles, and it is easier to understand a style with which we are more familiar.

We were surprised by the strength of this exercise in predicting team effectiveness over the course of the year. In fact, the ability of team members to understand each colleague's emotional expressions explained 40% of the variance in team performance (with an adjusted R^2 of 28%), which is

rare for research on psychological processes. However, these results also showed that sometimes less is more: Greater accuracy in understanding colleagues' positive emotions predicted better team performance, whereas greater accuracy with negative emotions actually predicted worse team performance. Teams whose members easily understood each other's expressions of amusement and happiness reported greater success in accomplishing their service goals and greater interest in working with each other again. By contrast, teams adept in understanding colleagues' anger, fear, and sadness reported lower evaluations of their team's work, less liking for each other, and less interest in working together again. While spending time with the groups that were very perceptive at understanding each other's negativity, I found that they were unable to translate this sensitivity into productive use. These teams got into spirals of negative energy.

The results of this study do not necessarily argue that the mutual ability to understand negative emotion is always unproductive. There are many situations in which we need negative feedback among teammates in order to improve—and in which failing to understand negative emotion would be a roadblock for learning. In this study, the public service teams consisted of young adults largely in their first full-time job, and they appeared not to have the skills to use negative emotion productively. Rather than perceiving negative emotions in colleagues as a warning sign to reevaluate the work they were doing or to reflect on their style of team interaction, they reacted defensively and escalated conflict. Overall, these results emphasize the complex interaction among the various components of emotional intelligence. In the absence of effective emotion regulation skills, it may be better not to have strong emotional perception skills. A balance among skills is important for emotionally intelligent behavior in teams. It is worthwhile to make an effort to achieve this balance, in light of the promise of greater team effectiveness.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

It is an exciting time to study emotional intelligence. However, it can also be a challenging time as well, because the research findings often do not stretch far enough to make recommendations that are as firm and unambiguous as managers and practitioners will ultimately need to make productive use of this research.

The initial evidence is very promising, suggesting strongly that greater emotional intelligence benefits work groups in organizational settings. This chapter emphasizes that there are two very different ways of thinking about what it means for a team to be emotionally intelligent: first, by examining the EI of individual members, and second by examining the EI displayed in

interactions among team members. The two perspectives, summarized in Fig. 8.1, complement each other by asking different questions about teams and thus provide different insights and opportunities for researchers and practitioners.

The first perspective—examining the EI of individual members—offers the chance to make predictions about team performance before a team is formed. For this reason, it is the only practical method that can be useful for choosing team members. By contrast, you cannot examine the team EI displayed in interactions among team members until the team is formed. Thus, the second perspective on team EI would be prohibitively expensive for choosing team members because team EI is more than the combination of its parts. And, in many cases, team membership must be driven by specific needs for the functional backgrounds and availability of individual members and cannot be adjusted based on emotional capabilities.

However, Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steve Wolff's work (chap. 11, this volume) shows us that the second perspective on team emotional intelligence should still be crucial at the time of team formation: Rather than using EI as a selection tool to choose team members, managers can use it as a development tool to help foster emotionally effective norms from the first meeting onward. Creating the conditions for teams to communicate openly can help to build trust, a group spirit, and a can-do attitude. Thus, emotionally intelligent behavior can develop in teams, regardless of the test scores achieved by individuals.

Both perspectives on the emotional intelligence of teams can be useful in crafting interventions once a team has already formed. When a problem arises that appears related to the interpersonal dynamics among colleagues, it is worthwhile to ask each of the questions on the right side of Fig. 8.1. Whether a team generally has the emotional resources that it needs, whether the team has anyone left behind in terms of emotional competencies, whether the team has anyone with exceptional skill who could help to build a more effective environment, and whether the team has members who speak the same emotional language all offer a chance to pinpoint possibilities for team coaching or altering team membership. It is also important to ask, encouraged by the second perspective, whether a team uses emotion effectively in its work. If the answer is no, then there is rich potential for intervention by a manager or qualified coach to develop more effective norms for emotional behaviors.

The first step in using emotional intelligence as a tool for improving team performance is to consider carefully the nature of the team's goals and contexts. Some teams work in environments that are more emotionally charged, sensitive, or sophisticated than others—for example, a negotiating team that represents a company to outside interests would most likely benefit more from emotional intelligence than a manufacturing team in-

ternal to the company. Likewise, a team that is responding to a set of system failures may benefit more than a team installing standardized new systems. Thus, it helps to decide when it is worthwhile to intervene in the emotional intelligence of a team. It will not always be the case—the research reviewed here should convince you that emotional intelligence is valuable, but complicated, in its impact on teams.

It is important for scholars to accumulate more evidence for the connection between the emotional intelligence of teams and effective performance. For example, what are the consequences when emotional processes such as the understanding of emotional expressions are interrupted, which can happen during telecommuting, during electronic communication, or in virtual teams? More research would be particularly helpful in examining critically and scientifically the results of strategies for intervening. We are only now at the stage where we have documented the likely impact of emotional intelligence in workplace settings, and we need to be careful and judicious with attempts to alter a team's emotional landscape. However, the current research suggests cause for optimism, as there could be great benefits for teams that can harness effectively the power of emotional intelligence.

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