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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TRAINING: WHAT TO CONSIDER

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WHAT TO CONSIDER

When it comes to Emotional Intelligence (EQ) training, there are many commercial off-the-shelf programs to choose from, and they vary widely in terms of learning objectives and the experiences they provide. To add to the confusion, there are many different models of emotional intelligence, making the decision even more perplexing.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF ANY TRAINING PROGRAM IS FOR PARTICIPANTS TO LEARN AND DEVELOP NEW SKILLS THAT THEY WILL PRACTICE ON THE JOB AND THAT WILL IMPACT BUSINESS PERFORMANCE FOR THE BETTER.

Some aspects of this equation are partly, or even entirely, out of your control; for instance, participants need to be motivated to learn and adapt new knowledge, which can be challenging to influence. But one thing that is in your control is choosing the program that will have the most impact. Good outcomes will be severely limited by the quality of the training program you choose, making it critical to choose a high-quality program that you can trust.

This paper outlines key criteria to consider when choosing an EQ program, along with important questions to ask when evaluating EQ training programs. Along the way we discuss problems with some traditional EQ programs.



KEY CRITERIA #1

EVIDENCE-BASED

Your first step will be to narrow down the field of potential programs and an important criteria to achieve this is to limit your choices to programs with solid base of research. This is critical; otherwise you are likely to choose an inferior program. There's an appropriate metaphor from computer coding that applies to training programs without research evidence—"garbage in, garbage out." If you don't know what went into the program's development, you can't have any faith that it will result in meaningful change for participants.

1
DOES THIS PROGRAM HAVE AN EMPIRICAL,
RESEARCH-BASED **EQ model**?

2
IS THERE A **personal assessment** ASSOCIATED
WITH THE PROGRAM THAT HAS DOCUMENTED
EVIDENCE FOR ITS RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY?

3
WHAT EVIDENCE EXISTS FOR THE **program's
effectiveness**?



1) DOES THIS PROGRAM HAVE AN
EMPIRICAL, RESEARCH-BASED EQ MODEL?

You should be able to find the answers to these questions on the provider's website. A **free, publicly available technical report** is usually a good sign that a program has research credibility. This report should clearly describe how the model was researched and developed. **The model shouldn't rely on existing models designed by other researchers, or be based solely on other organizations' research.** There are many EQ training programs that are guilty of this; most of them utilize a model proposed by Daniel Goleman in the early 1990s. This model has not been updated in decades and a large amount of research has identified shortcomings, all of which impact its effectiveness as a training tool ⁽¹⁾. Look for a program with independent and ongoing research that capitalizes on modern research findings.

2) IS THERE A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT
ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROGRAM THAT
HAS DOCUMENTED EVIDENCE FOR ITS
RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY?

The second important indicator is whether or not a personal assessment is tied to the model. This is important since an assessment provides participants with feedback on their EQ, hopefully using a multi-rater methodology. The report should contain **evidence for the reliability and validity of the assessment**. In other words, is the assessment dependable (reliability) and does it accurately measure what it intends to measure (validity)? These are the two most fundamental forms of research evidence and are required for any assessment that is developed according to professional standards ⁽²⁾.

3) WHAT EVIDENCE EXISTS FOR THE PROGRAM'S EFFECTIVENESS?

Finally, what evidence exists that the training program impacts job performance? This is a difficult criterion to meet since it is notoriously difficult to gather meaningful performance data that can be directly linked to training. Most often, **evidence is given for people's opinions about the program and how it has affected their behavior and attitudes.** This type of data is meaningful and should be considered along with other research evidence. A good sign that a training provider is credible is whether they have an **active research department** that is continually building evidence for their programs' effectiveness.

SUMMARY

WHEN EVALUATING A PROGRAM'S RESEARCH CREDIBILITY, LOOK FOR:

- A free, publicly available technical report
- The model shouldn't rely on existing models designed by other researchers, or be based solely on other organizations' research
- Evidence for the reliability and validity of the assessment
- Evidence for people's opinions about the program and how it has affected their behavior and attitudes
- Does the provider have an active research department?

KEY CRITERIA #2

FOCUSED ON SKILLS THAT MATTER

You want your EQ training to result in better performance. Therefore, the program should teach skills that clearly predict job performance and success. Also, these skills need to be things that can be learned and developed, as opposed to traits that are hard to influence. You can judge this criterion from the research evidence in the provider's technical report, but also from the training materials and exercises. Further, the program should align with your organization's talent needs and an identification of the skills that will be needed in the future.

1
IS THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE MODEL **limited to important job skills**, SUCH AS INFLUENCE, SELF-CONTROL, AND INNOVATIVENESS?

2
IS THERE EVIDENCE THAT THESE SKILLS **predict job performance**, AND CAN THEY BE LEARNED AND DEVELOPED?

3
DOES THE MODEL **align with your organization's talent needs?** WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION TO SUCCEED IN THE FUTURE?



KEY CRITERIA #2

1) IS THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE MODEL LIMITED TO IMPORTANT JOB SKILLS, SUCH AS INFLUENCE, SELF-CONTROL, AND INNOVATIVENESS?

2) IS THERE EVIDENCE THAT THESE SKILLS PREDICT JOB PERFORMANCE, AND CAN THEY BE LEARNED AND DEVELOPED?

The technical report should **show data that the model is measuring skills that matter in the workplace**. Many programs use models that were developed for general purposes and not specifically for helping people be more effective at work. Again, many of the competency models from the 1990s are examples of this since they were designed for self-help purposes. Even though many of these models have been adapted into workplace training programs, the models have not been updated to suit this purpose. These models have been criticized for measuring a “grab-bag” of competencies, many of which don’t have any **research evidence for impacting job performance**. This not only makes the programs unwieldy since the models are bloated, but you run the risk of wasting people’s time since they’re trying to develop skills that literally don’t matter. While EQ training can benefit people in multiple ways, you want a **focused, clear model that emphasizes the skills that matter at work**. Modern EQ programs should **proudly boast their credentials for impacting job performance**.

Along with predictive evidence, the provider should show **evidence that the skills in the program can be adequately learned, practiced and developed**. It goes without saying that you don’t want to waste training resources on abilities that cannot be understood and learned. Although this might seem like an intuitive judgment, there should be **research findings indicating that skills taught in the program can be reasonably learned**.

The training materials themselves are also an important piece of evidence for this criterion. Examine elements such as case studies and exercises; these should **use business examples and should be clearly applicable to your organization and participants’ daily realities**. When possible, try the exercises yourself and follow the prescriptions for practicing new skills. When designed effectively, these strategies should result in meaningful change.



KEY CRITERIA #2

3) DOES THE MODEL ALIGN WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION'S TALENT NEEDS? WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION TO SUCCEED IN THE FUTURE?

Finally, **compare the EQ model and improvement strategies to your organization's needs.** Has EQ been identified as an important ability for your organization? Why, exactly? Look at the details of the EQ model and the skills it teaches, and compare those to the important needs you've identified. There should be a strong overlap between your needs analysis and the EQ model skills. Critically, **there should not be a lot of "leftover" skills from the EQ model that do not directly map to your needs.** Again, this has been a concern of the older EQ models that contain too many skills that are unrelated to job performance.

SUMMARY

WHEN DETERMINING IF A PROGRAM FOCUSES ON SKILLS THAT MATTER, LOOK FOR:

- A focused model that emphasizes the skills that matter at work, proudly boasting their credentials for impacting job performance
- Research findings that indicate the skills taught in the program can be reasonably learned
- Business examples in case studies and exercises that are clearly applicable to your organization and participants' daily realities
- A strong overlap between your needs analysis and the EQ model skills



KEY CRITERIA #3

UTILIZES MULTI-RATER FEEDBACK

All personal development requires self-awareness, and this is especially true when trying to develop better Emotional Intelligence. In order to understand ourselves and the effect we have on co-workers, we need to recognize how other people perceive our behavior, and human beings are notoriously ill-equipped at this. In fact, there is much evidence that we're moderately delusional, often holding inflated views of our own abilities and performance. For instance, one famous study found that 94% of college professors considered their work "above average," which is statistically impossible ⁽³⁾. Multiple research studies over the years have found consistent results.

1 IS THERE A MECHANISM TO **collect feedback** FROM A VARIETY OF CO-WORKERS AND/OR OTHERS WHOSE OPINIONS MATTER THE MOST?

2 IS THE PRESENTATION OF FEEDBACK **simple and meaningful**, SO THAT PARTICIPANTS CAN EASILY GRASP THE KEY MESSAGES INHERENT IN THE FEEDBACK?

3 IF I HAVE PARTICIPANTS FROM ACROSS THE WORLD, ARE **country norms available** THAT WILL PROVIDE ACCURATE AND MEANINGFUL DATA?



1) IS THERE A MECHANISM TO COLLECT FEEDBACK FROM A VARIETY OF CO-WORKERS AND/OR OTHERS WHOSE OPINIONS MATTER THE MOST?

2) IS THE PRESENTATION OF FEEDBACK SIMPLE AND MEANINGFUL, SO THAT PARTICIPANTS CAN EASILY GRASP THE KEY MESSAGES INHERENT IN THE FEEDBACK?

The most-effective EQ programs will include feedback from co-workers on relevant EQ skills. We already discussed the importance of a research-based assessment tool. **Look for assessments that are multi-rater.** It is very important for participants to examine the discrepancies, and agreements of their self-perceptions with how coworkers see them. This is the cornerstone for developing an action plan to address their most fundamental needs.

One of the most frustrating aspects of many EQ assessments is their complexity. It is not uncommon to see assessment reports that are over 20 pages long, full of data analysis and complex statistical charts, but short on meaning. The designers of these reports were mostly psychometricians and statisticians who believed that “more is better.” The problem is that people are easily overwhelmed and confused by so much information. This not only makes it hard for them to pinpoint and focus on an area for development, but it has the unfortunate side effect of lessening motivation to change.

Look for an assessment that focuses on the story behind the data. The report should include a **meaningful interpretation and description of behavior.** The most important job of the assessment is to **describe how others see a person and to motivate them to change their behavior.**

3) IF I HAVE PARTICIPANTS FROM ACROSS THE WORLD ARE COUNTRY NORMS AVAILABLE THAT WILL PROVIDE ACCURATE AND MEANINGFUL DATA?

Finally, **look for an assessment that has norms from across the world.**

Norms allow people from a given country to compare their results to others from that country. This is obviously important for organizations with worldwide operations, but the availability of norms is also a good indicator that an organization has an active research operation and cares about the quality of its products.

SUMMARY

WHEN EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF THE FEEDBACK ASSESSMENT, LOOK FOR:

- Assessments that are multi-rater
- Assessments that focus on the story behind the data and a meaningful interpretation and description of behavior
- Norms from across the world that allow people from a given country to compare their results to others from that country

KEY CRITERIA #4

FOCUSED ON BEHAVIOR

When it comes to performance improvement, what matters is behavior – what people say and do, and how they say and do those things. Oftentimes when people hear the phrase “Emotional Intelligence” they assume that the program is about showing emotion at work and being “touchy-feely.” This is far from the goals of reputable EQ programs, whose objectives are to teach people about behavior and its effects on others. The lessons and strategies that are taught in a program should reflect this principle.

1
DOES THE PROGRAM **clearly define** EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, WHAT IT IS AND ISN'T, AND THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM?

2
DOES THE PROGRAM INCLUDE **practical behavioral strategies** THAT PEOPLE CAN FOLLOW TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE?



1) DOES THE PROGRAM CLEARLY DEFINE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, WHAT IT IS AND ISN'T, AND THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM?

Most EQ programs define Emotional Intelligence as something like “recognizing and understanding your own and others’ emotions, and using this knowledge to manage emotions.” While there is value in this type of definition, modern research also points to a **clear distinction between emotional understanding and behavioral effectiveness**. Recognizing and understanding emotions is important, but it’s more important to recognize the effects that your own behavior has on others and yourself. Even if your goal is to increase your emotional awareness, the best way to achieve this is through behavior change. Attitude follows behavior, and people will gain emotional insight through adjustments to their behavior. A simple example is listening. Small behavioral changes in how to pay attention and listen to others will provide tremendous understanding of the emotional undertones of what others are communicating.

2) DOES THE PROGRAM INCLUDE PRACTICAL BEHAVIORAL STRATEGIES THAT PEOPLE CAN FOLLOW TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE?

Look for an EQ program with a **strong focus on behavioral strategies, as opposed to gaining insight through self-awareness**. Many practitioners have stated that a person cannot become more Emotionally Intelligent without self-awareness; however, such awareness is best gained by making meaningful but simple changes to daily behavior. Related to this, **steer clear of programs that guide participants toward making radical changes**. Some programs make participants develop action plans that deal with multiple skills simultaneously. Neuroscientific research shows that this approach is overwhelming and leads to failure. For the brain, it is very similar to multitasking. A program should focus participants on changing only one thing at a time. This is more likely to succeed and has the side benefit of something called the “spillover effect.” This means that by working on one skill, such as listening, a person is likely to develop other skills, such as better relationships and more influence, just because she has become a more effective listener.



*"Its all about behavior change.
Act and you shall achieve!"*



SUMMARY

WHEN EVALUATING THE GOALS AND STRATEGIES OF AN EQ PROGRAM, LOOK FOR:

- A clear distinction between emotional understanding and behavioral effectiveness
- A strong focus on behavioral strategies, as opposed to gaining insight through self-awareness
- Avoid programs that guide participants toward making radical changes and action plans that deal with multiple skills simultaneously



KEY CRITERIA #5

QUALITY MATERIALS AND DESIGN

By considering the criteria discussed so far, you are well on your way to choosing a high quality EQ program. The last consideration is to look at the materials themselves and judge the quality of the presentation. This is important not only because it's a good indicator of a professionally developed program, but also because it will affect participants' perceptions of the program, and this can affect their attitudes and openness to learning about EQ. You want the program to be beyond reproach.

1
ARE THE MATERIALS **professional in appearance?**

2
DOES THE COURSE CORRESPOND TO STANDARDS OF **good instructional design?**

3
WILL PARTICIPANTS **value the training program**, RECOGNIZING ITS USEFULNESS AND ABILITY TO DIRECT THEM TO MEANINGFUL CHANGE?



1) ARE THE MATERIALS PROFESSIONAL IN APPEARANCE?

A program can contain a good model and assessment, but let's face it, appearance and packaging matters. Participants need to be comfortable with the materials. **They should look professional, be easy to navigate and reference after the program is over, and include meaningful information.** The best way to evaluate a program is to pilot test it with a limited group prior to rolling out throughout the organization. This will give you an opportunity to evaluate the potential impacts it can have on people and the value it can bring to the organization.

2) DOES THE COURSE CORRESPOND TO STANDARDS OF GOOD INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN?

Basic principles of good instructional design should be evident through the facilitation materials. Specifically, make sure that the **course objectives are clearly defined as behaviors to be learned and achieved.** There should be adequate time given for participants to practice new skills and to receive feedback on their performance. The exercises should be general enough to provide practice, but should be clearly applicable to work. **Visual images should be relevant and communicate important points.** Finally, the program should be **delivered in a way that is positive and leads toward motivation to act on the new information.** Ideally, there should be some form of personal development plan as an outcome that participants create throughout the day and that guides them towards implementation back at work.

3) WILL PARTICIPANTS VALUE THE TRAINING PROGRAM, RECOGNIZING ITS USEFULNESS AND ABILITY TO DIRECT THEM TO MEANINGFUL CHANGE?

Successful programs create buzz and enthusiasm. The best way to evaluate the potential experience your team is likely to have is to **look at reviews, testimonials and success stories other companies have had with the training.** While each group of participants has slightly different perspectives on the application of a course, in general a popular opinion will be comparable to average reviews.

No matter how many amazing stories or reports you uncover about past successes, there is no substitute for experiencing a program for yourself. The best way to evaluate a program is to **pilot test it with a limited group prior to rolling out throughout the organization.** This will give you an opportunity to evaluate the potential impacts it can have on people and the value it can bring to the organization, as well as get feedback from participants.

SUMMARY

WHEN EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF MATERIALS AND DESIGN, LOOK FOR:

- Professional materials that are easy to navigate and reference after the program is over, and include meaningful information
- Clearly defined course objectives as behaviors to be learned and achieved
- Visual images that are relevant and communicate important points
- Postitive reviews and testimonials
- Pilot test with a limited group

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TRAINING

CONCLUSION

This paper outlines key criteria to consider when choosing an EQ program, along with important questions to ask when evaluating EQ training programs.

When done right, Emotional Intelligence training works. One study that assessed participants' emotional intelligence, followed by training, followed by a reassessment found that scores were significantly higher upon reassessment on 19 of 20 competencies. On average, the follow-up scores for these participants were approximately 24% higher than the initial Emotional Intelligence scores⁽⁴⁾. Importantly, this program was professionally designed and administered, and the assessment was reliable and valid. So choosing a professionally developed program pays off.



TRACOM's program – **Behavioral EQ®** – is a third generation program that benefits from the most recent research in the field. We invite you to examine this program against your own criteria and specific needs.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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In his role as Senior Director of Learning and Development for TRACOM Group, Dr. Casey Mulqueen is responsible for leading the company and clients in developing and implementing learning solutions that reflect the latest science within the field of organizational psychology. To this end, Dr. Mulqueen has worked with companies across the world to develop more effective teams, sales processes and large-scale change models. He has developed custom programs and been a professional speaker for organizations such as EY, PepsiCo, the Environmental Defense Fund, Reed Elsevier, and ExxonMobil. His work involves the development and validation of individual and organizational assessments, including TRACOM's world-renowned Social Style Model™ and Behavioral EQ.

Dr. Mulqueen earned his PhD at the Illinois Institute of Technology and has served as an adjunct faculty member in Colorado State University's Department of Psychology. He is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology, and the International Association of Applied Psychology.

NOTES:

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ABOUT

TRACOM[®] GROUP

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We provide the “AH HAs” to people as to how and why they act and interact with the world around them the way they do. We do this by teaching people about the core elements of an individual: their behavior, their emotions and their mindset and the impact these elements have on them each and every day. We call these core elements Social Intelligence. Most people are completely unaware of the impact that these elements have on them each and every day in how they interact with others and how they frame what is happening in the world around them.

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