# Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Learning: Promoting Positive Learning Experiences

## *Literature Review*

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## Introduction

The main goal for our research is to explore the context of emotional intelligence in relation to one's learning experiences, as well as the outcomes of such experiences. Utilizing the extensive research and literature that illustrates the importance of knowing and applying emotional intelligence (EI) in various group settings, we aim to identify and understand how learning experiences elicit emotional responses, and vice versa. Upon completion of our research that focuses on four themes of EI in relation to academic and organizational learning environments, we intend to develop and implement assessment and learning activities in the classroom that will promote positive learning experiences.

## Literature Review Questions

In an effort to identify common themes found between EI and learning, three main questions were considered as part of this review:

- How does emotional intelligence (EI) support organizational change?
- How does knowing emotional intelligence (EI) impact one's learning experience?
- How are emotional intelligence abilities enacted in team learning?

In pursuit of these research questions, four primary themes were identified within our literature review: using EI to help facilitate and manage change, increasing the effectiveness of communication within team-based learning environments, creating psychological safety to support collaborative learning, and promoting self-reflection to identify behaviors associated with positive/negative learning experiences.

## Literature Review Findings

We utilized several online libraries and databases to locate literature on emotional intelligence, organizational learning, academic learning, adult learning, and learning within groups. Below is a synthesis of the findings, as they relate to learning, separated into four themes: change management, communication, psychological safety, and self-reflection.

### Change Management

In an ongoing quest to be competitive, organizations are being exposed to more significant change (Chrusciel, 2006, p. 645) that is mostly due to some internal or external factor that requires an organizational adaptation (Reich, 2000; Roach & Bednar, 1997). Therefore, modern organizations seek to promote employees' change ability skills and dispositions to help promote successful change, and ease transitions, at the organizational level (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Huy, 1999). Change adaptability requires that employees be able to cope with stress, focus on the task(s) at hand, and readily accept and identify task processes within change management (Schutte & Loi, 2014). Research has shown that employees who are aware and apply EI have better perception, understanding, and regulation of their emotions, they have a greater sense of control that helps to facilitate mastery of their reactions to change events, in the classroom as well as in the workplace (Schutte & Loi, 2014, p. 135). These highly adaptive individuals are ideal employees for organizations dealing with change as they help improve processes of change management and organizational transitions.

### Communication

Learners with high EI tend to exhibit effective communication skills. In the context of mentorship or coaching, communication skills are vital to the success of learner engagement. To achieve this, instructors or teachers must be attentive, listen actively, and take turns during open

discussions (Egan, 2013).  Similarly, in terms of team-based learning, individuals who are aware

of and can manage their emotions have greater communication skills and are better equipped to

resolve conflicts within the group learning/collaborative activities (Clarke, 2010, p. 139).

Research has shown that EI can favorably help to mediate a team's collaboration in comparison

to other factors like cognitive intelligence (see Appendix A for a pictorial representation) (Gosh,

2012, p 610). Generally, multiple studies confirm that communication exerts significant influence

on team learning (Eppler & Sukowski, 2000; Zarraga & Bonache, 2003).  It can be argued that

the desire to improve one's communication is to be at tune with one's own emotions.  Therefore,

instructors should consider the emotions of their learner(s), and make adjustments to the

content and climate of the discussion to allow for a more favorable learning environment.  These

findings show that effective communication in learning is a byproduct of effective of  EI.

## Psychological Safety

Safe learning environments are essential for the creation and exchange of learning content.

Within a safe environment, team members feel more open to share fears and learning anxieties,

perpetuating team learning and increased productivity.  In K-12 contexts, psychologically safe

classroom learning environments are essential for students' cognitive engagement and creative

expression (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003).  In corporate settings, psychologically safe

environments impact performance because employees are able to focus their attention on

resources and desired outcomes (Brown & Leigh, 1996). However, similar research caution

overzealous arguments for promoting psychological safety.  Sharing emotions and vulnerable

learning experiences do not always elicit openness from all members of the group (Gosh, 2012,

p. 610). One could argue in the majority of team-based learning communities, EI helps create

safe learning environments, which help learners mature academically and professionally.

Self-reflection can greatly influence one's ability to understand, manage, and regulate emotions. With direct relation between emotional intelligence and learning, Taylor (2001) states, "The outcome of this emotional exploration in conjunction with critical reflection leads to greater self-trust, inner strength and feelings of courage. By recognizing the interdependent relations of feelings and critical reflection there are significant implications for transformative learning" (p. 225). In an academic setting, learners reflect to make meaning from their experiences, to compare intended with actual outcomes, to evaluate their metacognitive strategies, to analyze and draw innovative relationships, and to synthesize meanings and apply their learning to new and novel situations (Costa & Kallick, 2009). In an organizational setting, learning occurs through a cycle of experience, reflection, and action, whereby reflecting on experiences leads to enhanced understanding and enhanced understanding leads to more effective action (Abe, 2011, p. 818). Key factors of emotional intelligence, such as emotional awareness and emotional management, seem to influence reflection as part of the learning process.  These key factors also influence learning within groups by improving opportunities for social engagement through improving communication and conflict management (see Appendix B for a pictorial representation) (Clarke, 2010).

## Gap(s) in the Literature

The main gap that we noticed in our literature was if a relationship exists between educational technologies, or EdTech, (i.e. media, machines, etc.) and EI in terms of supporting effective and positive learning experiences.  More and more educational institutions and corporate organizations are using EdTech as the primary methodology of enhancing learning, pedagogy, and instruction in their classrooms or learning environments.  As our main intent is to develop

and implement assessment and learning activities in the classroom that will promote positive learning experiences, our research would have benefitted greatly from understanding more about facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources (such as apps, products, and other such tools).

## Summary

According to the literature, emotional intelligence plays a major role in promoting positive learning experiences within various aspects of organizational, academic, and group learning:

- High levels of EI enable learners to be more equipped to handle challenging situations and to have more control over their emotions and reactions in the face of change, whether that change be in the classroom or in the workplace.
- Within a group learning capacity, individuals who are aware of and can manage their emotions have greater communication skills and are better equipped to resolve conflicts within the group learning and collaborative activities.
- When these easily adaptable and communicative learners are learning together within a psychologically safe environment, team members feel more open to share fears and learning anxieties, perpetuating team learning and increased productivity.
- Self-reflection enables learners with high EI to make meaning from and learn from their experiences and improve communication and conflict management within groups.

Considering that the most notable gap we encountered within the literature pertained to the relationship between EdTech and EI and how the two could promote positive learning experiences, our literature review findings provide the foundation for our main purpose of performing this research; developing and implementing EI assessments and learning activities for the classroom.  The relationship between EdTech and EI could be a future possible research

area that would pave the way for new ideas on how to promote positive learning experiences utilizing EdTech.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

| Effect of EI in work teams on mediator (a) | Effect of mediator on team learning (b) | Indirect effect of mediator (ab) | Bootstrap estimate of indirect effect of mediator | 95% CI for the estimate (lower limit to upper limit) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.8853* | 0.1894 | 0.6959 | 0.7064 | 0.3726-1.0775 |

Notes: $n = 48$; $*p < 0.01$

### Appendix B



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE → LEARNING PROCESSES IN TEAMS