Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Model

Some people are very clever but still struggle at work, while others get on well with almost everyone. The psychologist and science writer Daniel Goleman explained this difference in his book Emotional Intelligence, published in 1995. He built on earlier work by the researchers Peter Salovey and John Mayer, who published the first scientific model of it in 1990. In 1998, in a Harvard Business Review article called What Makes a Leader, Goleman described five components of emotional intelligence at work. Three of them help us manage ourselves: self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation, and two help us manage our relationships: empathy and social skills.

1. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to recognise our own moods, emotions and drives, and to understand how they affect other people. Self-aware people know their strengths and their limits, and they are honest about them. They can say what makes them angry, nervous or excited, and why. This knowledge also gives them realistic self-confidence, without arrogance. Self-awareness comes first in the model, because we cannot manage feelings that we do not notice.

Example: a student who knows that tiredness makes him impatient avoids difficult conversations late at night.

At work: Salma, a project manager, notices that she speaks sharply when deadlines are close. She tells her team about it and asks them to point it out when it happens.

2. Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods. It does not mean hiding our feelings; it means choosing how to act on them. People with good self-regulation think before they act and do not rush to judge. They stay calm under pressure and adapt more easily to change. Their steady behaviour also builds trust, because others know what to expect.

Example: a driver who is cut off in traffic takes a deep breath instead of shouting at the other driver.

At work: a client criticises Salma's team in a meeting. Instead of answering angrily, she pauses, asks questions and replies the next day with a clear plan.

3. Motivation

In Goleman's model, motivation means a passion for work that goes beyond money or status. Motivated people enjoy learning, like a challenge and take pride in a job well done. They set themselves high standards and keep track of their progress. They stay optimistic when things

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go wrong, and they keep going after setbacks. This inner drive often spreads to the people around them.

Example: a runner who trains for a race keeps practising on rainy days, because the goal really matters to her.

At work: when Salma's project is delayed, she does not give up. She sets small weekly targets for the team and celebrates each one they reach.

4. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of other people and to take them into account. It does not mean agreeing with everyone or trying to please everyone. It means noticing how others feel and considering those feelings when we make decisions. Empathy is especially important in teams, in work across different cultures, and in keeping talented people. Empathetic leaders listen carefully and notice the signals behind the words.

Example: a nurse notices that a patient is frightened and explains each step slowly and calmly.

At work: a quiet team member seems stressed. Salma talks to him in private, learns that he has a family problem, and reduces his workload for two weeks.

5. Social Skills

Social skills are the ability to manage relationships and build networks. People with strong social skills find common ground with others and build good rapport easily. They are good at persuading, handling conflict and leading change. In a way, social skills bring the other four components together. They help us move people in a useful direction through cooperation rather than pressure.

Example: a neighbour who knows everyone in the building organises a clean-up day that the whole building joins.

At work: two departments disagree about a deadline. Salma brings them together, listens to both sides and helps them agree on a plan that works for everyone.

Conclusion

In summary, Goleman's model shows that success at work depends on more than intelligence and technical skills. Self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation help us manage ourselves, while empathy and social skills help us manage our relationships. Goleman argued that emotional intelligence can be learned and improved with practice and feedback. A good start is to choose one component, practise it for a few weeks and ask trusted colleagues for honest feedback. Over time, these small changes make us better colleagues and better leaders.

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