



Everything you need to know about emotional intelligence

by Sue Johnston

Emotional intelligence and “primal leadership”—these business trends are white hot at the moment, and communicators should be thrilled. The author explains the ideas and suggests ways communicators might take advantage of them.

“No creature can fly with just one wing,” write Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee in *Primal Leadership*. “Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head—feeling and thought—meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar.”

As I write this, *Primal Leadership: Realizing The Power of Emotional Intelligence*, (Harvard Business School Press) has soared onto the top 25 business best-sellers list at Amazon.com and sits anywhere from third to ninth on a handful of other sales lists. While that’s hardly a measure to bet your career on, it’s safe to wager that a book this popular will influence business thinking. That’s good news for communicators because *Primal Leadership* recommends a set of leadership skills aligned with excellent communication practices.

It describes a world in which executives understand the effect their actions, their words and even their moods have on employees. They recognize the human context of the workplace and the impact of interpersonal relationships on the job. They listen. They show empathy. They ignite passions through compelling visions that appeal to human emotions.

In short, they get it. They practice what communicators have been preaching forever—using the tools of effective communication to achieve business results.

If, as the authors metaphorically suggest, feeling and thought are dual wings that support leaders, then communication represents the landing gear, allowing the soaring leader to manoeuvre on the ground, in the everyday world. It helps a leader persuade the flock to join the journey when s/he says, “Come, fly with me!”

Communicators are needed to help build communication competence throughout emotionally intelligent organizations. Doing it well may help us make the leap from a tactical to a strategic role, from counsellor to decision maker.

Daniel Goleman's 1995 best-seller, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, (Bantam), suggested that being in tune with one's self and able to understand and use emotions is more important than intellect. By linking neurological evidence about 'soft skills' to research from life situations, he redefined what it means to be smart.

Today, in *Primal Leadership*, Goleman and co-authors Boyatzis and McKee provide an approach business leaders can use to develop their own emotional intelligence and encourage it in their organizations.

The need to lead

Since it first appeared, Goleman's EI work has found a wide audience at a time the corporate world was looking for new tools to meet business goals. Processes and people came under the careful scrutiny of armies of consultants. But organizations were still missing something. Attention turned to leadership.

Today's leaders are bombarded with new challenges, from all sides:

- 1) Hoping to build competent, committed, cost-effective work forces from a generation of highly skeptical independently minded workers, they need radically new ways to motivate and communicate with employees.
- 2) Globalization and new economic partnerships add complexity to the decision-making environment, calling for cross-cultural, interorganizational and political sensitivity.
- 3) Employees, customers and regulators have joined special-interest groups in calling for organizations to behave in more socially responsible, people-friendly ways.
- 4) In the post-Enron world, the public is mistrustful of businesses, even those that employ them. 'Regaining trust' has become a leadership objective.
- 5) The terror attacks of September 2001 brought corporate leaders face-to-face with the human aspects of an unimaginable tragedy that, for most victims, took place at work. The need for human skills in the workplace was never more apparent.

Against this backdrop, *Primal Leadership* presents a research-based response to the quest for a formula that will:

- 1) permit leaders to master the human skills their roles increasingly demand and
- 2) help organizations recruit, develop, promote and retain good leaders—and retrain or lose the bad ones before they can do more damage.

What is emotional intelligence?

The EI theory seems to explain why people of average intelligence can excel in life —and why smart people do stupid things. It suggests that IQ contributes just 20 per cent to our success. The rest comes from knowing how to deal with our emotions and those of others.

Neurological research shows humans have the equivalent of two minds operating independently. One thinks and one feels. EI is a balance between the reasoning, thinking mind and the emotional, feeling mind. The feeling mind drives us to take action or take flight when confronted with danger. Handy if your job is hunting mastodons, but this “fight or flight” mechanism isn’t useful in today’s workplace. Strong emotions interfere with our ability to think clearly, diverting us from the path. According to EI theory, we can overcome this “emotional hijacking,” but rather than eliminate or ignore emotion in the workplace, we must be aware of emotions and use them.

In his EI research, Goleman examined capabilities of successful leaders from 188 large, international organizations. Analysis showed that, while certain technical and cognitive skills are important, emotional intelligence is twice as critical. He tied this to research showing companies whose leaders scored high in EI competencies outperformed their earnings targets by 20 percent.

The EI competency model describes 18 behaviors relating to managing ourselves or managing relationships. Goleman suggests an individual can increase EI with concerted, thoughtful practice over time. Highly effective leaders typically exhibit strengths in about half the competencies; even the most outstanding leader won’t have them all.

Communicators will spot familiar language in the model, words like *vision*, *conflict management*, *persuasion*, *transparency* and more. These describe the executives we want to work with and the leaders we want to be.

PERSONAL COMPETENCE	
These capabilities determine how we manage ourselves.	
Self-Awareness	Self-Management
<p>Emotional Self-Awareness: Reading one’s own emotions and recognizing their impact; using ‘gut sense’ to guide decisions.</p> <p>Accurate Self-Assessment: Knowing one’s strengths and limits.</p> <p>Self-Confidence: A sound sense of one’s worth and capabilities.</p>	<p>Emotional Self-Control: Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses under control.</p> <p>Transparency: Displaying honesty and integrity; trustworthiness.</p> <p>Adaptability: Flexibility in adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles.</p> <p>Achievement: The drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence.</p>

Initiative: Readiness to act and seize opportunities.

Optimism: Seeing the upside in events.

SOCIAL COMPETENCE

These capabilities determine how we manage relationships.

Social Awareness	Relationship Management
<p>Empathy: Sensing others' emotions, understanding their perspective and taking interest in their concerns.</p> <p>Organizational Awareness: Reading the currents, decision networks and politics at the organizational level.</p> <p>Service: Recognizing and meeting follower, client or customer needs.</p>	<p>Inspirational Leadership: Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision.</p> <p>Influence: Using a range of tactics for persuasion.</p> <p>Developing Others: Bolstering others' abilities through feedback and guidance.</p> <p>Change Catalyst: Initiating, managing and leading in a new direction.</p> <p>Conflict Management: Resolving disagreements.</p> <p>Teamwork and Collaboration: Co-operation and team building.</p>

The EI competencies are familiar turf for communicators and the competencies of Relationship Management are right out of our toolbox.

- 1) Inspirational Leadership—Who articulates the organizational vision?
- 2) Influence—Who knows how to influence people over whom we have no formal authority?
- 3) Developing Others—Does communication with employees help them understand their organizations and their places in them and, thus, improve performance?
- 4) Change Catalyst—What communication is not, at its root, asking someone to do, know or believe something different?
- 5) Conflict Management—Know of any conflict that would not be improved and resolved through consciously excellent two-way communication?
- 6) Teamwork and Collaboration—Does anyone in the organization

have a wider internal network than the communicator? (Besides the guy who fixes the printers.)

What is primal leadership?

Primal Leadership takes EI theory and applies the competencies to leadership in organizations. It suggests that when great leaders move people and ignite passion for the task, they use the principles of *contagion* and *resonance*.

People working together catch each others' emotions, even without speaking, and nobody's moods are more contagious than the leader's. Behaviour at the top of an organization or work group can infect everyone on the team and their work, for good or ill. As communicators, we see this phenomenon in climate studies, employee opinion surveys and focus groups.

Emotionally intelligent leaders create in an organization something PL theory calls *resonance*. As in music, people vibrate in compatible frequencies and the organization hums. Less sensitive leaders create organizational *dissonance*—there's vibration, but not harmony.

PL theory identifies six leadership styles that use EI competencies in varied combinations that resonate differently. One individual may exhibit all six styles, and the ability to use the right one at the right time is a PL trademark.

Visionary Leaders create resonance by moving people toward shared dreams. They're most successful when change demands a new vision or a clear direction. Of all the styles, it contributes most to organizational achievement. Inspirational leadership, transparency and empathy are its key competencies.

Coaching Leaders create resonance by linking individual needs with organizational goals. They have a highly positive impact on organizational climate. The style is most useful in helping employees improve performance by building long-term capabilities. Key competencies are developing others, emotional awareness and empathy.

Affiliative Leaders build resonance by connecting people to each other. The style has less impact on organizational effectiveness than the visionary or coach, but is useful in healing rifts in a team, motivating teams during stressful times, or building intraorganizational connections. Empathy and developing relationships are key competencies.

Democratic Leaders value people's input and build commitment through participation. Positive effect is strongest when consensus is needed. The downside can be an appearance of indecision. Key competencies are listening and collaboration.

Pacesetter Leaders meet challenging goals and build resonance if their team is very motivated and competent, but they wear people out. They have a negative impact when goals are poorly communicated and can seem unreasonable. Drive and initiative are the key competencies. If pacesetter leaders lack empathy, as they often do, the result can be organizational pain.

Commanding Leaders can soothe fear by giving clear direction in an emergency. But without a crisis, the style detracts from a healthy, productive climate. Influence, achievement and initiative are key competencies. Self-awareness, emotional self-control and empathy can keep a commanding leader from going astray.

Developing the requisite competencies and knowing when to use which style are elements of PL that can be learned through a program of self-study, 360 degree feedback, coaching and practice. PL suggests a five-step learning process.

- 1) Imagine the ideal self.
- 2) Discover the real self.
- 3) Build a learning agenda to reduce gaps between ideal and real and build on strengths.
- 4) Experiment with new behaviors, thoughts and feelings; practice.
- 5) Develop trusting relationships that support each step in the process.

Communicators can use these ideas not only to develop their own EI competencies but also to help build EI companywide.

Developing EI in the organization

Building EI across large groups uses a process similar to individual training. It starts with recognition of the ideal situation and the gap between it and reality. Organizations benefit when individual leaders change their ways, but transformation is most likely when there is a concerted effort to develop a critical mass of resonant leaders. But CEOs can't simply send everyone on a course and expect to awaken an EI organization. It's a slow process, requiring practice thinking and behaving in new ways so that the brain is, effectively, rewired or reprogrammed to be emotionally intelligent.

It also requires active, effective, ongoing communication—good news for our profession. In individuals, EI competence involves the interaction of intellect and emotion and the parts of the brain that control them. In an organization, the same is true; the spirit or feeling of the enterprise mixes with intellectual capital and know-how. But unlike humans, organizations have no neurological connection. For 'organizational brain circuitry' to work successfully and build organizational EI, a third layer is required—communication.



The language of leadership

One of the reasons leadership development efforts fail, say PL theorists, is that organizations don't develop a "language of leadership—meaningful words that capture the spirit of leadership by symbolizing ideas, ideals and emotionally intelligent leadership practices."

Communicators can use transformational language in formal communication on behalf of the organization and informal communication within it. Whether or not there is a formal initiative to build EI competencies, communicators can introduce EI language and concepts into the organization through their role as influencers and their choice of form and content in official communications.

Where there is a formal program, communicators can and should be partners in promoting it. It cannot be led from Corporate Communication or Human Resources but must be driven from the top and involve people from the bottom up. Still, communicators, in their role of vision-crafters and storytellers, can play an effective role in clarifying the goals and presenting the program in language that will inspire understanding and commitment.

Historically, organizations have asked employees to check their emotions at the door. Now they may be asking them to recognize them, name them and use them to build better relationships and better organizations. Communicators can help create an environment in which the language of EI is fluently spoken and understood.

Help clarify the vision

PL theory tells us visionary leaders are the most successful in creating a climate that promotes effective work and successful outcomes. Communicators have long had a role in helping organizations articulate their visions. Words, images, symbols and

stories are tools of our craft. Communicators can be formidable allies to visionary leaders, refining and adding detail and understanding to inspired visions—making them inspiring.

One of the first steps in developing EI in individuals and organizations is to create a picture of the ideal state. Because communicators are skilled at describing this state, they are adept at helping to formulate the vision. Developing skills such as dynamic inquiry and coaching methods, communicators can assist organizational leaders in uncovering the vision then articulate it to attract support, boost people's confidence, and point them in the right direction.

Practice what you preach

The vision for the communication profession is that we are organizational leaders, not merely helpers. We are part of a team that combines knowledge, technical skills and leadership styles to develop the future of our organizations. With that in mind, it is critical for us to develop our own emotional intelligence.

As communicators, we influence people who don't report to us. Most of us can name at least one person whose style is a model for our decisions. By understanding and developing EI skills in our own lives and business roles, we model them for others.

If we develop our EI, we are less likely to develop what the Primal Leadership authors call 'CEO disease.' One need not be a CEO to be a victim of this ailment, in which you have no idea how you are doing or what effect you have on your organization *and no one will tell you*. In EI we find the courage to help our leaders overcome this affliction, finding ways to instigate meaningful conversations about emotional issues.

Preach what you practice

The popularity of EI, its successors and clones makes it almost inevitable that, overtly or covertly, the ideas and practices will be adopted, in some fashion, by the organizations that employ us. We need to be ready, not only to talk about EI intelligently and create effective communications, but to lead the charge.

EI principles are in tune with those of 21st century communicators. The emphasis on stakeholder relations in building, maintaining and recovering corporate reputation requires sensitivity to others, empathy, conflict management, teamwork and transparency, all EI competencies. Employee development and performance management, which touch anyone communicating with employees or managing others, calls for coaching, listening, consensus building and other EI attributes.

The changing role of the communicator

Veteran communicators marvel at the rapid change in our profession. A few years ago, we were craftsmen, recruited from journalism and valued for our writing skills and newsroom contacts. Some were, often unwittingly or unwillingly, 'spin doctors,' paid to

make a nonstory look newsworthy—or the reverse.

Today, communicators who want careers—or good professional fun—carve out more strategic roles for themselves. They understand the workings of their business—and of business in general. They build relationships across organizations and, using the ideas below, find ways to develop communication capabilities throughout the enterprise.

Become expert at interpersonal communication

Organizational communicators have an untapped opportunity to build expertise in person-to-person communication. Historically, our strength has been in formal communication programs and processes, yet emotionally mature organizations must understand the dynamics of interpersonal exchanges. This can be a powerful skill to add to a communicator's repertoire, particularly in environments, where cultural diversity adds to the complexity.

Understanding the communication styles—and communication barriers—diverse individuals use and experience can be a valuable tool for the EI communicator. It helps us present and interpret messages, key ingredients of stakeholder awareness.

Develop leadership communication

Professional communicators are uniquely positioned to develop programs that encourage the sort of open and honest communication EI requires and that theorists say is effective and necessary for communication excellence. We can develop workshops, management toolkits, handy guides, communication newsletters and other learning tools to nurture the communication skills leaders need. It's outside our box, but if we don't do it, who will?

Develop the coaching role

With or without formal leadership communication programs, communicators can adopt the role of communication coach for leaders and potential leaders in their organizations. We can turn conversations into coaching moments by helping individuals recognize what is taking place and how they feel about it. Showing people how to be better communicators builds their skills and develops our skills in coaching, a key EI competency.

Find the tipping point

The tipping point is the level at which a small change has a large effect. The PL authors cite work that determines how much of any competency is required for outstanding performance. Where communication is concerned, the tipping point may be farther away than we think. Being sensitive to people's feelings, learning styles and information needs may reveal a need for more repetition, recasting the communication in many ways and delivering it in different formats. It also may require a greater amount of listening.

The last word

EI and PL represent opportunities for organizations and for

organizational communicators. The skills prescribed in *Primal Leadership* are so nicely attuned to techniques of successful communication that we'd do well to embrace and develop them for our organizations, our profession and ourselves.

Building the visionary leadership so successful in creating a climate of excellence can renew our excitement about the profession. Embarking on EI development for oneself and one's organization can rekindle that passion as we embrace new ideas and master new techniques.

Passion is great, say the *PL* authors, but they warn us to monitor what they call the PWI (Perceived Weirdness Index). "Break the rules," they say, "but don't scare people away." That's the balanced approach—EI at work.

Sue Johnston is a communication consultant based in Bermuda. She can be reached by e-mail at johnston@ibl.bm.

[Sign up for a Risk-Free Trial Subscription to *Journal of Employee Communication Management*](#)

■ [about ragan](#) ■ [customer service](#) ■ [contact us](#) ■ [search](#)



© 2003 [Lawrence Ragan Communications, Inc.](#)
316 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 300, Chicago, IL 60601
Phone: 800.878.5331 Fax: 312.960.4106
E-mail: [Customer Service_ Web Manager](#)