

History of Emotional Intelligence

In the 1870s Charles Darwin published the first modern book on the role of emotional expression in survival and adaptation.

In the 1920s, the American psychologist Edward Thorndike talked about something he called “social intelligence.” Later the importance of “emotional factors” was recognized by David Wechsler, one of the fathers of IQ testing. In 1940, in a rarely cited paper, Wechsler urged that the “non-intellective aspects of general intelligence” be included in any “complete” measurement. This paper also discussed what he called “affective” and “conative” abilities – basically, emotional and social intelligence – which he thought would prove critical to an overall view. Unfortunately, these factors were not included in Wechsler’s IQ tests, and little attention was paid to them at the time.

In 1948, another American researcher, R.W. Leeper, promoted the idea of “emotional thought”, which he believed contributed to “logical thought.” But few psychologists or educators pursued this line of questioning until more than 30 years later. (One notable exception was Albert Ellis, who, in 1955, began to explore what would become known as Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy – a process that involved teaching people to examine their emotions in a logical, thoughtful way. Then, in 1983, Howard Gardner of Harvard University wrote about the possibility of “multiple intelligences,” including what he called “intra-physic capacities” – in essence, an aptitude for introspection – and “personal intelligence.”

By this time Reuven Bar-On was active in the field and had contributed the phrase “emotional quotient” or EQ. The term “emotional intelligence” was coined and formally defined by John (Jack) Mayer of the University of New Hampshire and Peter Salovey of Yale University in 1990. They expanded on Professor Gardner’s concept, settled in the definition of emotional intelligence and – with their colleague David Caruso – have since developed an alternative test of emotional intelligence that, unlike the EQ-I (Emotional Quotient Inventory), is not self-reporting but ability-based. This test, called MSCEIT (Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test) has generated a considerable amount of research over the past nine years. The authors of The EQ Edge have worked with them in the development of this test in the hope that looking at the phenomenon of emotional intelligence from two different perspectives will shed even more light on this important capacity.