

# Emotional Intelligence and Simulation



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## KEYWORDS

- Emotional intelligence • Simulation • Graduate medical education
- ACGME core competencies

## KEY POINTS

- Emotional intelligence (EI) is how an individual manages his or her own emotions and the emotions of others; this concept is well established in the business literature but is still a nascent field of research in medical education.
- Simulation has many characteristics that make it well suited to deliver EI development interventions because of its safe, standardized environment.
- Effective simulations to develop EI in surgery will likely require preparatory work, occur during protected education time, and provide participants with immediate feedback or assessment.

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: BACKGROUND

### *Definition and Conceptual Models*

A commonly cited definition of EI is the “ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.”<sup>1</sup> More succinctly, EI describes how an individual manages his or her own emotions and the emotions of others. Salovey and Mayer<sup>2</sup> introduced their theory of EI in 1990, and the topic has since gained both academic and popular interest, most notably through the writings of Harvard Business School Professor Dan Goleman<sup>3–6</sup> who wrote in his 1998 essay “What Makes a Leader?” that “emotional intelligence is the *sine qua non* of leadership.”

Although the idea of EI was introduced more than 20 years ago, there continues to be academic debate regarding the nature of EI. Several researchers embrace the conceptualization of EI as an ability, either as a social intelligence or a type of cognitive skill.<sup>1,4,7–9</sup> Others have promoted a trait conceptualization of EI in which an individual’s

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EI reflects disposition and personal characteristics.<sup>10,11</sup> The particular stance toward EI influences the approach to EI measurement and assessment.<sup>12,13</sup> Within an ability construction of EI, self-report is inadequate to capture how an individual performs with regard to managing his emotions and the emotions of others. Furthermore, an ability model of EI presents the challenge of determining objective standards against which ability should be measured. For the trait model of EI, pure self-report can be an effective way to determine an individual's tendencies and characteristics but may not adequately reflect how the individual performs in reality.<sup>10,11,14</sup> For example, people who have low trait assertiveness may, through self-awareness and practice, succeed in negotiations, even though it may be more effortful for them compared with a colleague who has high trait assertiveness. Both the trait and ability frameworks of EI reject the hypothesis that EI is fixed and immutable. Rather, proponents of both models assert that EI can be taught, learned, and developed and that it responds to life experiences and the conscious self-development efforts of an individual.<sup>5,14,15</sup>

### ***Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace***

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Much of the increasing interest in EI is driven by research that demonstrates a positive relationship between EI and work performance characteristics, primarily in the corporate setting. In a study of executives in a multinational food and beverage company, McClelland<sup>16</sup> found that those hired based on emotional competencies had a 6% 2-year turnover rate compared with the 50% turnover rate experienced by those hired through traditional methods. Furthermore, executives with strong EI exceeded annual earning goals by 20%, whereas their colleagues with lower EI underperformed relative to targets. There were similar findings in the European and Asian divisions, suggesting that the importance of EI is not limited to particular cultural contexts. Other researchers demonstrated that the emotional competency of stress management was positively correlated with job performance in retail store managers as measured by net profits, sales per square foot, sales per employee, and sales per dollar inventory investment.<sup>17</sup> Goleman<sup>5</sup> claims that EI is twice as important as technical skill and traditional intelligence quotient as an ingredient to excellent job performance across all employment levels and business sectors. He asserts that the importance of EI increases with position, with up to 90% of the difference in performance of senior leaders attributed to differences in EI factors.

A meta-analysis of 57 published research articles that included more than 12,000 individuals also supports the claim that EI is a valid predictor of job performance.<sup>18</sup> EI may also influence group functioning, with high-EI teams demonstrating a high level of performance throughout a task, in contrast to low-EI teams, which start out at lower levels of performance and eventually catch up to the performance level of the high-EI teams.<sup>19</sup> In short, the business community has embraced EI and the view that by placing a high value on the skill of emotion management, a company can improve performance and consequently profits, optimize employee hiring and retention, and create a more satisfying customer experience.<sup>20,21</sup>

## **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN SURGERY**

### ***Rationale for Increased Interest in Physician Emotional Intelligence***

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Perceiving and managing emotions is fundamental to medicine as physicians must navigate their own emotions as well as the emotions of patients and other team members, often in high-tension and charged situations, to succeed as effective practitioners. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) has defined 6 core competencies—Patient Care, Professionalism, Systems-based

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