

SELF-AWARENESS, EMPATHY AND EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION. FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence has become one of the most productive constructs for understanding how human beings recognise, use and manage their own emotions and those of others. The present article examines three of its core components – self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation – as an interdependent functional unit rather than as separate skills. The present paper proposes an integrative reading of the extant literature on emotional intelligence, with the aim of offering a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to successful emotional regulation and empathic accuracy. To this end, the paper draws upon a range of models of emotional intelligence, including those proposed by Daniel Goleman, Salovey and Mayer, Petrides and Furnham, and Bar-On. The integrative reading proposed by the present paper positions self-awareness as the cognitive-affective foundation that enables both empathic accuracy and self-regulatory capacity. The article combines a conceptual-theoretical analysis with a qualitative synthesis of the relevant literature, with the aim of clarifying the mechanisms through which self-observation of one's own affective states supports the recognition of others' emotional states and the deliberate regulation of one's own emotional reactions. The discussion addresses the educational and professional relevance of these three competencies, arguing that their deliberate cultivation, rather than their innate presence, differentiates successful long-term adaptation from chronic emotional dysregulation. The paper concludes with the proposal of a three-tier integrative model – self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation – as a practical framework for educational and organisational interventions aimed at developing emotional competence.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; self-awareness; empathy; emotional self-regulation; emotional competence; personal development

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1. Introduction

For over a century, psychology has been dominated by the intelligence quotient (IQ) paradigm, which has reduced human potential to a set of cognitive abilities measurable through standardised tests. While this perspective has proven beneficial in certain predictive contexts, it has been inadequate in elucidating the reasons why individuals with elevated IQs often encounter challenges in their interpersonal relationships, professional careers, and personal lives, while others with average cognitive abilities often achieve success in their relationships, professional careers, and personal well-being. Since the late 1980s, this discrepancy has given rise to a conceptual space for an alternative form of intelligence, centred not on the processing of abstract information, but on the processing of affective information.

The concept of emotional intelligence, first introduced into the scientific literature by Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) and subsequently popularised on a global scale by Daniel Goleman (1995), has precipitated a paradigm shift in the way personal and professional success is understood. Emotion is no longer regarded as a disruptive factor in rational thinking; rather, it has been recognised as a source of adaptive information, indispensable to decision-making, interpersonal relationships and behavioural self-regulation.

Of the numerous components of emotional intelligence, three occupy a distinct structural position: self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation. Self-awareness is the foundational element of the entire framework, as it is an indispensable prerequisite for effective management. Empathy has been defined as the ability to understand the emotions of another person, and is therefore an extension of an individual's capacity for observation. Emotional self-regulation has been shown to transform the emotional information one is aware of – whether about oneself or others – into an adaptive, controlled and goal-oriented behavioural response.

The present article has three objectives. Firstly, the main theoretical models of emotional intelligence are to be systematised, with an emphasis on the mixed model proposed by Daniel Goleman. Secondly, an in-depth analysis of the three components in question – self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation – is required from the perspective of their psychological mechanisms and the functional interdependencies between them. Thirdly, the proposal of an original, integrative model is posited, which positions self-awareness as the cognitive-affective foundation of the other two competencies. This has implications for educational practice and for personal and professional development.

The structure of this paper is predicated on the logic of the aforementioned objectives. Firstly, the theoretical grounding of the concept of emotional intelligence is provided. Then, the three components are analysed in turn. The methodology of the analysis is described. The results of the literature review are presented. Finally, the practical implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

2. Literature review (theoretical foundation)

2.1. The following essay will explore the concept of emotional intelligence, examining the relevant conceptual frameworks and theoretical models.

2.1.1. From multiple intelligences to emotional intelligence

The conceptual roots of emotional intelligence can be traced back to the work of Edward Thorndike, who, in the 1920s, spoke of 'social intelligence' – defined as the ability to understand and act wisely in interpersonal relationships (Thorndike, 1922). Subsequent to this, Howard Gardner (1983) advanced the theory of multiple intelligences, which challenged the prevailing notion of logical-mathematical intelligence as the exclusive explanatory factor. This theory proposed seven distinct types of intelligence, among which were intrapersonal intelligence, defined as the capacity to comprehend one's own emotional life, and interpersonal intelligence, defined as the ability to discern and respond appropriately to the states, motivations and desires of others. These two forms of personal intelligence subsequently formed the conceptual framework from which the construct of emotional intelligence was to develop.

The term itself was first formulated in a systematic manner by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, in a seminal article published in 1990, in which emotional intelligence was defined as the ability to monitor one's own emotions and those of others, to distinguish between them, and to use this information to guide thought and action (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Although the article initially had a limited impact within the academic community, the publication, five years later, of Daniel Goleman's comprehensive work, *Emotional Intelligence: The publication of Why It Can Matter More Than IQ** (1995) resulted in the transformation of the concept into a phenomenon of public discourse, with major implications for the fields of education, human resource management and personal development.

2.1.2. The ability model: Salovey and Mayer

The model proposed by Salovey and Mayer, subsequently termed the 'ability model', was developed to distinguish it from the mixed models that followed. The model structures emotional intelligence into four hierarchically organised branches, ranging from the simplest processes of perception to the most complex ones of reflective management of emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). The initial branch, emotional perception, pertains to the capacity to discern one's own and others' emotions, manifested through facial expressions, voice, posture, or language. The second branch, the facilitation of thinking through emotion, concerns the manner in which affective states direct attention, generate alternative perspectives on problems and influence judgement and decision-making processes. The third branch, emotional understanding, refers to the ability to analyse complex emotions, to understand their causes and consequences, as well as the likely transitions from one emotional state to another. The fourth branch, emotional regulation, involves the ability to remain open to both pleasant and unpleasant

emotions, to reflect on them, and to regulate them according to the context, in order to achieve personal and interpersonal goals.

The merit of this model lies in its psychometric rigour: it treats emotional intelligence as a genuine cognitive ability, measurable through performance tasks (not merely through self-report), thereby reducing the risk of confusion with personality traits.

2.1.3. Daniel Goleman's 'mixed model'

The 'mixed model' proposed by Daniel Goleman is a departure from the narrow 'skills' model. In contradistinction to the latter, the 'mixed model' integrates a number of components. These components include not only the strictly cognitive aspects of emotional processing, but also personality traits, motivations and learned behavioural competencies. In his 1995 work, Goleman identified five fundamental domains of emotional intelligence, which were subsequently reconfigured in *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998), within a framework applied to the organisational context: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Goleman, 1995, 1998).

The distinguishing feature of Goleman's contribution is not the absolute novelty of the individual components, many of which had already been discussed in differential psychology and personality psychology, but the relational architecture he proposes. The five domains do not function in isolation, but rather in a developmental sequence, in which self-awareness is the prerequisite for self-regulation, and empathy mediates the transition from intrapersonal competence to interpersonal competence. The results of this sequence manifest themselves in social skills. Goleman himself emphasises, citing research in the field of affective neuroscience, the role played by the amygdala and limbic circuits in triggering rapid emotional reactions, as well as the role of the prefrontal cortex in inhibiting and modulating these reactions – a neurobiological argument for the need for the deliberate cultivation of emotional skills (Goleman, 1995).

2.1.4. Bar-On's Model of Emotional and Social Intelligence

A parallel contribution, developed independently, is that of Reuven Bar-On, who proposed the concept of emotional and social intelligence (ESI) and developed a method for assessing it using the EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Inventory) tool, launched in 1997 (Bar-On, 1997). Bar-On's model is structured around five domains: intrapersonal competence, interpersonal competence, adaptability, stress management and general disposition. The model has a clinical and predictive orientation rather than an explanatory one, having been originally designed as a tool for assessing a person's ability to cope with environmental pressures.

2.1.5. The trait model: Petrides and Furnham (2001)

This model proposes a fourth approach to the distinction between ability-based and trait-based emotional intelligence. The former is measured by peak performance tests, and the latter is defined as a constellation of emotional perceptions underlying personality. The latter is assessed

exclusively through self-report questionnaires. This methodological distinction is of considerable significance: while skill-based emotional intelligence demonstrates a modest correlation with classical measures of general intelligence, trait-based emotional intelligence exhibits partial overlap with the dimensions of the Big Five personality model, particularly with (negative) neuroticism and (positive) extraversion.

2.1.6. A synthesis of the models

When viewed comparatively, the four models presented – the skills model, the mixed model, the Bar-On model and the trait model – do not necessarily compete with each other, but rather complement each other. Each model captures a different facet of the same phenomenon: the human being's capacity to process affective information appropriately. For the purposes of this paper, Goleman's model remains the main point of reference, not because it is psychometrically superior to the others, but because it provides the most fruitful framework for understanding the functional relationship between self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation – a relationship which forms the analytical core of this article.

2.2. The ability to comprehend one's own emotional state is widely regarded as the cornerstone of emotional intelligence.

2.2.1. Conceptual Limitations

Emotional self-awareness is defined by Goleman (1995, p. 43) as the ability to recognise an emotion at the very moment it arises. This ostensibly straightforward definition obscures a significant complexity: emotions are not invariably accessible to reflective consciousness in real time, either because they manifest at a diffuse physiological level (e.g., muscle tension, an increased heart rate), or because individuals have learned, throughout their development, to deny them, rationalise them or dissociate them from self-awareness. Emotional self-awareness is therefore not a passive state, but an active metacognitive skill – the ability to observe the flow of one's own emotional life without being completely absorbed by it. Goleman (1995) calls this a form of 'neutral attention', borrowing a term from the contemplative tradition.

2.2.2. The Components of Self-Awareness

In the refined version of the model, as presented in *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (1998), Goleman breaks self-awareness down into three sub-competencies. The concept of emotional awareness encompasses the ability to recognise one's own emotions and their impact on cognitive processes, behavioural patterns, and overall performance. Accurate self-assessment is defined as an honest understanding of one's own resources, inner limitations, strengths and vulnerabilities, without defensive distortions such as overestimation or underestimation. Self-confidence is the functional outcome of the first two components, namely a stable sense of one's own worth and abilities, which is not dependent on external validation.

It is imperative to underscore the interdependence of these three sub-components, which are inextricably linked. The efficacy of an accurate self-assessment is contingent upon the presence of functional emotional awareness, and the cultivation of authentic self-confidence – as distinguished from defensive, compensatory self-confidence – is predicated on a realistic self-assessment.

2.2.3. Psychological and neurobiological mechanisms

From a neuroscientific perspective, emotional self-awareness is theorised to involve the activation of circuits that connect the limbic structures – which are responsible for the rapid generation of affective reactions – with the prefrontal cortex, which is involved in monitoring and interpreting these reactions (Goleman, 1995). Antonio Damasio has demonstrated, through a substantial corpus of research that intersects with the domain of emotional intelligence, that the somatic states concomitant with emotions – which he designates 'somatic markers' – function as expeditious, pre-rational signals that guide decision-making prior to its articulation at the cognitive level. Emotional self-awareness can therefore be defined as a process of decoding concrete, physiologically anchored bodily signals, rather than being merely an abstract introspective exercise.

2.2.4. The Significance of Self-Awareness in Emotional Intelligence

In the context of the framework proposed by Goleman, self-awareness is not merely one of the five components of emotional intelligence; it is the logical and functional prerequisite for the other four. It is impossible for an individual to self-regulate an emotion of which they are unaware, just as it is unlikely that a person incapable of recognising their own emotional states will develop genuine empathy towards the emotional states of others – rather than a purely imitative or superficial form. Research conducted on alexithymia — the inability to identify and verbalise one's own emotions — has indirectly confirmed this hypothesis, demonstrating consistent correlations between elevated levels of alexithymia and deficiencies in empathy, in addition to challenges with emotional regulation (references to numerous clinical studies can be found in the literature from the 1990s onwards, which are also summarised by Goleman, 1995).

According to the literature specialising in this field, individuals who possess a high level of emotional self-awareness have been shown to exhibit a more realistic decision-making style. They also demonstrate an increased ability to recognise their limitations without allowing them to become sources of paralysing anxiety. Furthermore, they exhibit a greater openness to constructive feedback. These characteristics are all prerequisites for sustained professional performance over time, not merely for individual psychological well-being.

2.3. The concept of empathy is defined as the ability to understand the feelings of another individual, which is derived from the emotional resonance that occurs between two or more people.

2.3.1. A multifaceted skill

Whilst self-awareness concerns the intrapersonal dimension of emotional intelligence, empathy is associated with the interpersonal dimension. Goleman (1995, 1998) defines empathy as the ability to perceive others' emotions, even when these are not explicitly expressed. Empathy is a concept that has been extensively researched in the domain of psychology. Conventional wisdom in the field distinguishes at least three distinct facets of empathy, which are not equivalent and may vary independently from one person to another. These three facets of empathy are cognitive empathy, affective (or emotional) empathy, and empathic concern.

Cognitive empathy is defined as the ability to intellectually understand another person's perspective, i.e. to 'read' their thoughts and intentions, without necessarily experiencing the same emotions. This component is closely linked to what developmental psychology calls 'theory of mind', namely the ability to attribute mental states distinct from one's own to another person. Conversely, affective empathy is characterised by a direct attunement with another's emotional state, involving a process of 'feeling along with' the other person. This phenomenon occurs through a mechanism that engages the mirror neuron system, as initially described by Giacomo Rizzolatti's team and subsequently explored in the literature on emotional intelligence as a potential neural basis for interhuman affective resonance. Finally, the concept of empathic concern introduces a motivational dimension to these two components, characterised by the active desire to respond to another person's suffering or need through an act of support.

2.3.2. Empathy in Goleman's Model

In the 1998 version of his model, Goleman (1998) categorises empathy into five interconnected sub-competencies. Firstly, 'understanding others' involves recognising the feelings and perspectives of others and taking an active interest in their concerns. Secondly, 'developing others' involves recognising the developmental needs of those one interacts with and supporting their skills. Thirdly, 'service orientation' involves anticipating, recognising and meeting the needs of beneficiaries or clients. Fourthly, 'leveraging diversity' involves cultivating opportunities through diverse types of people. Finally, 'political awareness' involves reading the emotional currents and power dynamics within a group or organisation.

This theoretical framework extends empathy beyond the strictly emotional sphere, towards a complex social competence applicable in a variety of contexts, including but not limited to organisational, educational and community settings. These contexts encompass a wide range of relationships, such as those between teachers and pupils, managers and employees, and doctors and patients.

2.3.3. The Limitations and Risks of Empathy

Recent research on empathy, although conducted after the period covered by Goleman's model, has also brought to light its less favourable aspects. Excessive empathic activation, unchecked by effective emotional self-regulation, can lead to compassion fatigue. This phenomenon has been frequently documented among helping professions, including healthcare professionals, social workers, teachers and psychologists. This finding corroborates, from a complementary standpoint, the central hypothesis of this article: that empathy cannot function adaptively in the absence of a functional capacity for emotional self-regulation, which enables an individual to feel another's suffering without being completely overwhelmed by it.

2.3.4. Empathy as a Mediator between Self-Awareness and Social Competence

A closer inspection of the relationship between self-awareness and empathy reveals a generative nature. Research on mirror neurons and body simulation suggests that the mechanism by which we recognise another person's emotion is based, at least in part, on the activation of our own bodily representations of that emotion. That is to say, we relate to another person's emotion by 'reading' it through the filter of our own internal emotional experience. A person with poor emotional self-awareness is likely to have a poorer internal repertoire of affective 'models' against which to relate the emotional signals of others, which limits empathic accuracy – a key distinction between genuine empathy and the mere behavioural imitation of compassion.

2.4. The process of emotional self-regulation is defined as the transition from impulsive behaviour to a more adaptive response.

2.4.1. Definition and Adaptive Function

Emotional self-regulation is defined by Goleman (1998) as the ability to manage one's own inner states, impulses and resources. Contrary to the common misapprehension in non-specialist discourse, self-regulation is not synonymous with the suppression or denial of emotions. Rather, it is an active process of modulating the intensity, duration and mode of expression of an emotion, depending on the context and the individual's goals. An unregulated emotion does not simply disappear; rather, it is released uncontrollably or becomes somatised. Similarly, a suppressed emotion is not regulated, but merely postponed, often at a high cognitive and physiological cost.

2.4.2. The components of self-regulation in Goleman's model

The 1998 model categorises self-regulation into five sub-competencies. Self-control can be defined as the effective management of disruptive emotions and impulses. Trustworthiness is defined as the maintenance of standards of honesty and integrity. The concept of conscientiousness is predicated on the assumption of individual responsibility for one's own performance. Adaptability is defined as the capacity to demonstrate flexibility in the face of change. Innovativeness is defined as a personal trait denoting a propensity to embrace novel concepts, methodologies and data.

A salient observation that emerges from this compendium is that emotional self-regulation, as conceptualised by Goleman, is not confined to the regulation of negative impulses – although this remains its most visible and most frequently studied component – but also encompasses a proactive dimension, oriented towards adaptation and innovation; that is, the ability to utilise emotional energy as a resource, not merely to contain it.

2.4.3. Cognitive Mechanisms of Self-Regulation

From the perspective of cognitive psychology, emotional self-regulation is theorised to operate through at least four relatively distinct mechanisms. These mechanisms are as follows: situation selection (deliberately avoiding or seeking out contexts that elicit certain emotional states), situation modification (actively changing a context to reduce its negative emotional impact), redirecting attention (voluntarily shifting attention away from the emotional stimulus towards other aspects of the situation) and cognitive reappraisal (reinterpreting the meaning of an event to alter its affective impact). Of these, cognitive reappraisal is considered, in the literature following Goleman, to be the most effective long-term strategy, being associated with healthier psychological functioning than the expressive suppression of emotion. Whilst this reduces the visible manifestation of affect, it does not reduce its internal physiological activation and may negatively affect interpersonal relationships through the perception of inauthenticity it generates.

2.4.4. The concept of self-regulation can be defined as a synthesis of self-awareness and empathy.

Emotional self-regulation cannot be understood in isolation from the two components analysed above. The absence of self-awareness in the individual results in a paucity of information regarding the precise elements that require regulation and the direction in which they should be directed. In the absence of empathy, the capacity for self-regulation becomes susceptible to an overly individualistic framework, with the emphasis on the regulation of one's own state while demonstrating a lack of consideration for its impact on others. To illustrate this point, consider a person who has mastered the art of managing their anger, yet fails to cultivate a genuine sensitivity to the consequences of their past actions on those in their vicinity. Authentic, mature self-regulation is defined by the integration of information about oneself with information about others, in a behavioural response that simultaneously serves one's own needs and the quality of the interpersonal relationship.

2.5. The following paper sets out an integrative model which synthesises the concepts of self-awareness, empathy and self-regulation as a functional system. This model is the original conceptual contribution of the paper, as evidenced by a synthesis of the literature analysed in the previous sections. The three components – self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation – should not be regarded as discrete items in a list, as they frequently appear in summaries of Goleman's model, but rather as a functional system with a sequential and, concurrently, circular architecture.

In the initial phase of the system, self-awareness furnishes the fundamental informational elements: namely, the awareness of one's own emotional state, whether in real time or through subsequent reflection. Absent this stage, the system remains at the level of automatic, unreflective reactions. In the subsequent stage, this capacity for self-observation is expanded through mechanisms of emotional resonance and cognitive inference to the decoding of others' emotional states – empathy. This is not an automatic extension; rather, it necessitates an active exercise of 'stepping outside' one's own perspective and simulating the other person's perspective. This exercise is facilitated, as has been demonstrated, precisely by the richness of one's own emotional repertoire, cultivated through self-knowledge. In the third stage, the information generated by the first two components – about oneself and about the other person – is integrated into a regulated behavioural response: emotional self-regulation.

The inherent circularity of the system is predicated on the phenomenon that the regulated response, in its capacity to generate internal feedback, in turn engenders new affective information concerning the consequences of one's own reaction. This, in turn, serves to inform self-awareness, thus engendering a cycle of progressively refining emotional competence. In practice, an individual who successfully regulates their anger in an interpersonal conflict gains additional information about their own control resources as a result of this successful regulation. This additional information will enrich their emotional self-awareness for similar future episodes.

Despite the fact that this model is founded upon a synthesis and reinterpretation of extant literature as opposed to original empirical research, it possesses significant heuristic value within the domain of education. The model posits the hypothesis that interventions designed to cultivate emotional intelligence should adhere to a didactic sequence. The cultivation of empathy or self-control in a pupil or adult is predicated upon the initial investment in systematic exercises in emotional self-awareness (e.g. emotional journaling, exercises in identifying and naming emotional states, applied mindfulness techniques).

3. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is of a theoretical and conceptual nature. A qualitative literature review has been applied to a corpus of sources deemed to be representative of the field of emotional intelligence. The corpus comprised two distinct categories of works. Firstly, it included the seminal works on the concept, namely the article by Salovey and Mayer

(1990), as well as the two reference volumes by Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998). Secondly, it also encompassed works that are complementary to or offer alternatives to Goleman's model. These alternative works drew on the tradition of the skills model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004), the tradition of Bar-On's model of emotional and social intelligence (Bar-On, 1997), and the tradition of the trait model (Petrides & Furnham, 2001).

The selection of sources was guided by two criteria: theoretical relevance, defined as the pioneering nature of the works, which are frequently cited in the field's review literature, and conceptual complementarity, defined as the ability of the sources to contrast and nuance the central reference model. The literature review was organised thematically, rather than chronologically, to allow for a direct comparison of how each model addresses the three competencies under consideration – self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation.

The analysis procedure consisted of three successive stages: The following three steps were taken in order to analyse the three competencies under review. Firstly, the definitions and components associated with these competencies were extracted from each source. Secondly, these definitions were compared in order to identify conceptual convergences and divergences between models. Thirdly, the results were synthesised into an original integrative model, which is presented in the fifth section of the paper. The methodological limitations of this approach are discussed in the final section of the article, including the absence of an original empirical basis and the risk of subjective selectivity in the sources.

4. Results

A comparative synthesis of the four theoretical models analysed reveals a high degree of conceptual convergence, despite terminological and methodological differences. Table 1 summarises how each model addresses, explicitly or implicitly, the three central components of this paper.

Table 1. *The treatment of self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation in the main models of emotional intelligence*

Theoretical model		Component equivalent to self-awareness	Component equivalent to empathy	Component equivalent to self-regulation
Salovey and Mayer (the skills model)	(the skills model)	Emotional perception (branch I)	Interpersonal emotional perception (branch I, extended)	Emotional regulation (branch IV)
Goleman (the mixed model)	(the mixed model)	Self-awareness	Empathy	Self-regulation
Bar-On (ESI model)	(ESI model)	Intrapersonal competence	Interpersonal competence	Stress management

Petrides and Furnham (the trait model)	Emotional self-perception (trait)	Empathy (trait)	Emotional regulation (trait)
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An analysis of this table reveals an important initial finding: although none of the four models was constructed on the basis of the hypothesis of an explicit sequential relationship between the three components, all four implicitly treat them as distinct but interdependent domains of the same broader capacity for processing affective information. This structural convergence supports the plausibility of the integrative model proposed in section five of the article.

The second finding concerns the central position of self-awareness. In all four models, the component equivalent to self-awareness is placed – either explicitly or by the order of presentation – before the components associated with empathy and self-regulation – a further indication, of a structural-descriptive rather than causal nature, of its fundamental role.

The third finding concerns the difference in the treatment of self-regulation between Goleman's model, which breaks it down into a relatively diverse set of sub-competencies (self-control, adaptability, innovation), and Bar-On's model, which reduces it, to a large extent, to stress management – a more restrictive conception, oriented predominantly towards the reactive, defensive dimension of emotional regulation, rather than its proactive dimension.

5. Discussions and conclusions

The present analysis corroborates the hypothesis that self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation are not three discrete components of emotional intelligence, but rather three stages of a unified process of adaptive processing of affective information. The process is founded upon self-awareness, from which empathy is derived, extending the process beyond individual boundaries into the affective domain of the other. Self-regulation is then instrumental in transforming this empathy into an appropriate behavioural response, both for the individual and for the interpersonal relationship in which they are engaged.

This standpoint carries direct practical ramifications for the domain of education. Programmes for developing emotional intelligence in a school context – known in the English-speaking literature as SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) – would, according to the argument developed here, be more effective if they followed an explicit pedagogical sequence. This sequence would entail exercises in identifying and naming one's own emotions, which should precede exercises in understanding the emotions of others. Exercises in understanding the emotions of others, in turn, should precede exercises in the behavioural management of conflicts and impulsive reactions. An intervention that commences with rules of behaviour, such as "control your anger", without first developing the pupil's capacity to recognise and articulate their

emotional state, may engender only superficial compliance, without fostering enduring emotional competence.

The implications of this phenomenon extend beyond the confines of the educational sphere. In an organisational context, managers who invest in their own emotional self-awareness – through systematic feedback and structured reflection on their own reactions in high-pressure situations – lay the foundations for empathetic leadership. This kind of leadership is capable of discerning the team's actual state of affairs, rather than merely its formal communication. Consequently, teams guided in this manner have been observed to cultivate a more stable emotional climate, which, in turn, has been shown to facilitate performance and staff retention.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the paper. Firstly, the theoretical and conceptual nature of the approach does not allow for direct empirical validation of the integrative model proposed in Section 5; at this stage, it remains a working hypothesis derived from a qualitative synthesis of the literature, rather than a conclusion supported by the author's own experimental data. Secondly, while the corpus of sources analysed is representative of the foundational models of the field, it does not exhaust the diversity of contemporary research on emotional intelligence, particularly developments over the last two decades in the fields of affective neuroscience and positive psychology.

It is recommended that future research endeavours focus on empirically testing the hypothesis of sequentiality proposed in this study. This can be achieved by designing longitudinal studies that track the simultaneous development of the three competencies over the course of educational intervention programmes. Additionally, the use of validated measurement instruments for each of the three dimensions is advised. The present study posits that research in this area could serve to either corroborate or refine the generative relationship proposed in this article between self-awareness, empathy and emotional self-regulation. It is contended that these three components, far from being mere descriptive labels, represent, as Daniel Goleman's work demonstrated over three decades ago, the essential resources through which an individual builds both their inner balance and the quality of their relationships with others.

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