

# **Emotional Intelligence and Diversity: A Transformational Process for Professional Success and Personal Effectiveness**

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## **How do you react when ...**

- You hear ethnic or racial slurs or jokes from people who defend their behavior by saying, “We can’t have fun around here anymore now that we have to be so politically correct
- Diversity is belittled and ignored as the “flavor of the month”
- Your input is not solicited or your suggestions are ignored because of your age, education, experience or gender
- Executives give verbal support for diversity but fail to come through with resources and action that demonstrates commitment when the chips are down

Careers are made and broken and your metal tested in times like these when your deepest values are touched and your emotions kick in. Diversity does have the potential to bring many benefits, but it’s hard to access the benefits at times like these when the clash of differences makes your blood pressure spike. Then the outcome is more likely to be anger, frustration and hurt rather than creativity and broadened perspective.

This is where emotional intelligence comes in. Developing the capacity to understand and manage your feelings and deal effectively with others, no matter how great the differences, is a critical competence and key to your professional success. In today’s workplace, where it’s not uncommon to find four or five generations, multiple languages, many ethnicities and races, and differences in gender, sexual orientation, religion, personalities and values, dealing with differences is a reality and a key requirement. How well you do that will depend in great part on your emotional intelligence.

## **The EID Model**

The Emotional Intelligence and Diversity (EID) four-part model gives you insight and understanding about your emotions and subsequent behaviors as well as the emotions and behaviors of others. The model also offers a system to help you develop the skills you need to have interactions that are more productive and harmonious, less difficult and contentious. The

competencies are both insight and action-based and pave the way for an intentional approach to more productive relationships that lead to successful accomplishment of goals.

### **Affirmative Introspection**

Dealing with diversity is an “inside job.” The place to start is looking inward at how you are wired so you can understand your own reactions, feelings and behaviors in the face of differences. **Affirmative Introspection** is the ability to take an honest, non-judgmental look at yourself. This involves accepting what you see, both your strengths and your vulnerabilities. This self-awareness is key to both managing your own emotions and accepting others.

The three skills that make up **Affirmative Introspection** are:

- Knowing what makes me tick
- Being comfortable in my own skin
- Being in tune with my own biases and hot buttons

### **Self-Governance**

The next aspect of EID, **Self-Governance**, is an action-based competency that helps you deal with the range and intensity of feelings experienced and triggered by differences. Most of us have seen people who manage their feelings poorly. Doing so can be like lobbing a grenade. Neither repressing nor exploding are effective ways to deal with volatile emotions. The energy of emotions triggered when dealing with uncertainty, change and the clash of differences, the energy of emotions needs to be managed and channeled in a constructive direction. The skill of maintaining healthy self-control in the face of upsetting emotions is what Self-Governance is about.

The three skills that make up **Self-Governance** are:

- Making ambiguity an ally
- Being my own change master
- Getting in charge of self-talk

### **Intercultural Literacy**

Focusing on yourself is only one-half of the job when it comes to dealing with differences. Understanding others is the second half. This involves first knowing about cultural differences that influence everyone’s behavior. Defined by Geert Hofstede as “behavioral software,” culture is the set of rules, norms and preferences that tell us how to behave and how to interpret the

behavior of others. **Intercultural Literacy** involves the ability to understand the wide variety of cultural norms while also seeing both the upsides and downsides of all of them. Additionally it entails being able to get beyond your own perspective and empathetically walk in another's shoes. **Intercultural Literacy** is a key skill in developing acceptance and understanding of others who are different so you can interact with them productively.

The three skills that make up **Intercultural Literacy** are:

- Understanding the cultural whys behind behavior
- Seeing the benefits and limitations of all norms
- Transcending my own perspective (empathy)

### **Social Architecting**

**Social Architecting**, the fourth aspect of EID conveys the idea that each individual can be a bridge-building engineer in one-on-one relationships, work groups and organizations. It involves taking action to behave in ways that intentionally create productive dialogue across differences while communicating in ways that resolve conflict effectively. It also means structuring a work environment that gets the best of everyone's talents and skills, utilizing creativity in an emotionally safe space. Whether you are an employee, team member, manager or leader, being a **Social Architect** is a critical competency in making a diverse work environment a healthy, rich and productive place for all.

The three skills that make up **Social Architecting** are:

- Serving as a cultural interpreter
- Communicating effectively and resolving conflicts in diverse settings
- Structuring synergistic and compelling environments

### **Summing Up**

EID is a system that emphasizes managing emotions effectively in a world of differences. Focusing on conscious, intentional insight and actions that help you understand yourself and others can be a major contributor to an inclusive, effective and productive workplace and a successful, satisfying life in and out of work.

To find out more about Emotional Intelligence & Diversity, get the authors' new book, *Emotional Intelligence for Managing Results in a Diverse World* (Davis-Black, 2008) and go to their website: [www.EIDI-Results.org](http://www.EIDI-Results.org).

# **Emotional intelligence & Diversity Series**

## **Affirmative Introspection: Looking Inside for a Pat on the Back and a Kick in the Pants**

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- Have you ever wondered why you often repeat some behaviors that you promised yourself you would stop doing?
- Are you aware that you feel more comfortable in some settings and with some groups than others?
- Can you remember times when you reacted emotionally when one of your diversity hot buttons got pushed?

**Affirmative Introspection**, a key element of Emotional Intelligence & Diversity, is the ability to take an honest look at yourself with curiosity in a nonjudgmental way. It involves the ability to get insights into the multiple layers of your experiences and accept what you see, both your strengths and your vulnerabilities. This commitment to shedding light on your behaviors, feelings and intentions is a key element in choosing a better and more effective future, managing your emotions and accepting others.

Contrary to the popular notion that people are born with introspective capacities and that they can't be developed, you can train yourself to develop introspection skills. These skills will give you a greater sense of clarity and comfort with yourself. You will also increase your optimism and resilience by having an affirming, non-judgmental attitude. Let's take a look at what **Affirmative Introspection** involves.

### **Knowing what makes you tick**

Knowing what makes you tick is a critical affirmative introspection competency because you can't control others, but on your best days, you can control yourself. Knowing who you really are, what motivates you, what brings you down, what you expect from yourself and others, and what shaped and influenced those needs and expectations is vital if you want to be not only right, but also effective. Developing awareness of yourself and your motivators frees you to choose more wisely from multiple options and increases the likelihood of building satisfactory and productive relationships.

### **Being comfortable in your skin**

How often do you wish we were a different height, a different weight, a different...you name it. Achieving comfort with yourself can be difficult. In order to become effective in accepting, valuing and dealing with others, though, you first need to become aware of those aspects of yourself that you have difficulty accepting. Emotional Intelligence skills in this area help you become aware of the different aspects of yourself that are not in harmony with your own image and come to terms with them. Emerson said “We can travel the world over but we take ourselves with us.” There is no escape from ourselves. The path to loving, respecting and honoring others is to love, respect and honor yourself first.

### **Being in tune with your own biases and hot buttons**

Stereotypes, biases and hot buttons reflect the opinions, beliefs and knee-jerk reactions that we all have but are often too embarrassed to acknowledge. The film “Guess Who is Coming to Dinner” became popular in the USA because it touched this truth. We all have biases and hot buttons which can create strong feelings and reactions.

Perhaps you remember when you made a stereotypical assumption about someone. Was it when a supervisor gave you feedback in a very emotional way or when a client put stress on you with a last minute demand? How about the time a job applicant you were interviewing gave you a résumé with a misspelled word? Acknowledging these biases and hot buttons and their impact is the first step in managing them.

Not only do we all have “hot buttons” at work but we may be, without knowing it, the hot button for others. For example you may be a person who thrives on many visitors and having lively, loud conversations with them during the work day. Your office mate may prefer to work in peace and quiet with no disruption.

At times some of these behaviors are difficult for us to tolerate and they create intense emotions that lead us to respond impulsively and escalate a conflict. We feel “emotionally hijacked” by these hot buttons. It is only from our awareness of them and that we can choose to respond in a non-explosive way and free ourselves to behave in a more emotionally intelligent and effective way.

Gaining deeper insight into ourselves through Affirmative Introspection is the first of the four Emotional Intelligence and Diversity competencies. In the next article you’ll find out how to manage your reactions and feelings through Self-Governance.

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## **Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Series**

### **Self-Governance: Managing Your Emotions So They Don't Sabotage You**

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Contrary to the old saying, “What you don't know won't hurt you,” what you don't know and don't manage can hurt you when it comes to your emotional reactions. The understanding you gained in Affirmative Introspection of why you react to differences is just a first step in helping yourself deal effectively with the feelings that emerge. Once you know what bothers you and why, you then need to be able to direct the energy of your emotional response in a way that is constructive. It is the Emotional Intelligence and Diversity competence of **Self-Governance** that helps you manage your emotions in the face of ambiguity and change that are often part of the challenge involved in dealing with diversity. It also involves taking charge of your self-talk, the internal messages that are often defeating and negative when we are faced with differences.

What emotions are triggered for you when ...

- You can't make yourself understood because no one speaks your language(s)?
- People discount you because of your ethnicity, age or gender?
- Someone makes incorrect assumptions about you based on stereotypes?
- You perceive that someone has been discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, accent or appearance?

Do you feel irritation, frustration, confusion, anger or rage? Chances are you had some feeling reactions to each of these situations. If you have had any of these experiences they probably touched some of your most sacred values and they put you in a situation where you had to deal with uncertainty about how to manage the incident and the reactions of others. A basic human need is to keep ourselves safe, both physically and emotionally. To do that, we need to have a sense that we can control situations and have the approval of others. Yet dealing with differences often shakes one or both of these two pillars of safety. It is often the feeling of being out of control and unable to gain the approval of others that leads us to react emotionally. You may have feelings of frustration that you can't get the clerk to understand what you want; hurt at being discounted; disgust at being stereotyped or rage at unfair treatment. Each of these reactions

is triggered by a sense of losing control or approval or, in some cases, both. Three competencies can help you manage these reactions: making ambiguity an ally, becoming a change master and getting in charge of your self-talk.

### **Making Ambiguity an Ally**

Dealing with differences often puts us in new territory where the rules and expectations are unclear and confusion about situations and their consequences abounds. This is especially so in diverse environments where different values and beliefs often present choices between two rights or two undesirable choices, not a right and a wrong. Living with the uncertainty and lack of closure in ambiguous situations is unsettling, often triggering feelings of anxiety, fear and discomfort. One aspect of **Self-Governance** is the ability to manage this discomfort and, rather than look for a quick fix for the situation, sit with it long enough to work it through.

In your diverse world, what kinds of ambiguous situations are you dealing with where you are faced with a tough dilemma? Perhaps you want to confront a coworker about the stereotypic comments or ethnic jokes he is making, yet you want to maintain a harmonious relationship. Maybe you want to know more about dealing with a person that is different from you in physical ability or sexual orientation, yet you are reluctant to ask questions to learn more for fear of offending. Maybe you've felt excluded or unfairly treated yet you don't want to come off as a whiner and complainer. You may find someone's performance unsatisfactory yet you don't want to be accused of prejudice if you give feedback. Managing the discomfort of not knowing clearly what to do starts with identifying the different and conflicting needs and values in the situation and making peace with not having an answer right away.

### **Being Your Own Change Master**

Another aspect of diversity that often triggers emotions is change. Feelings emerge when demographic shifts bring us into contact with new groups, when other generations exhibit values and behaviors that we are not used to and when cultural and language differences block communication or require us to shift our responses. Managing our reactions to changes such as these by understanding the threat we perceive in them and by seeing, not just the losses but the gains they bring, are key steps in becoming your own change master.

What changes has diversity brought into your life which have triggered strong feelings in you? Is it that your neighborhood now has signs in languages you can't read? Is it the requirement to learn about other cultures so you can work more effectively with customers,

students or patients? Being a change master means identifying both the losses and the gains in these changes so you can move to acceptance and find constructive responses.

### **Managing Your Self-Talk**

Finally, **Self-Governance** requires that you recognize and manage your own self-talk, the internal dialogue that can sooth or scare, calm or enrage. When these mental messages are accurate and affirming, you manage your feelings in a healthy way. When they are negative and exaggerated, you “awfulize” the situation and make yourself feel powerless, causing emotions to get out of control. Telling yourself “It is a tough problem but I’m up to dealing with it because I’ve dealt with other issues as difficult,” is a more rational and affirming self-talk message than, “I’m not going to be able to handle it and I’ll look like a failure.” “I don’t have much experience with this group so I may make mistakes,” is more realistic than, “I should be able to handle this and know what to do.” Talking to yourself with less exaggerated, self-defeating messages gives you a chance to respond in more productive ways. For example, you can take steps to talk with those who are from a different group and ask them help you understand their culture rather than avoid them because of a fear of embarrassment.

What kind of self-talk messages are in your head when you deal with differences that are difficult, frustrating or confusing? Becoming aware of them is the first step. Then, challenging them when they are inaccurate, exaggerated or defeating is the second step. Getting rid of messages like “They’re doing this to me on purpose,” “I’ll be out of control,” or “Poor me,” will help you manage your emotions by getting in charge of your self-talk, avoiding a victim stance and putting you back in the driver’s seat. Replace them with realistic and positive messages such as “I’m up to the challenge,” “others have dealt with much worse situations.”

You will increase your competence in **Self-Governance** if you work on making ambiguity your ally rather than your enemy, becoming the master of change rather than its victim and taking charge of your self-talk so that it is affirming rather than alarming.

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# **Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Series**

## **Intercultural Literacy: Reading Others More Accurately**

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Success in our global world requires the ability to understand, get along with and appreciate people who are different from us in meaningful and concrete ways. From obvious aspects such as language differences to more subtle ones such as world view, values and customs, awareness of the impact culture has in shaping behavior is a crucial part of emotional intelligence and professional effectiveness. The good news is that there is both a knowledge and skill base that helps people become more culturally literate. The three areas of **Intercultural Literacy** are: Understanding Cultural Whys Behind Behavior, Seeing the Benefits and Limitations of All Norms and Empathy, Transcending One's Own Perspective.

### **Understanding Cultural Whys Behind Behavior**

Have you ever ...

- Been surprised when a staff member dissolves in tears and seems deeply humiliated when you give what you would consider objective, non-accusing feedback?
- Felt uncomfortable when someone stood too close or talked too loudly?
- Misinterpreted a handshake, touch or facial expression?

If you have encountered any of these you were probably experiencing cultural differences and you might not have known you misinterpreted a behavior. One way to understand culture is to see it as behavioral software, a set of operating rules for how to solve problems, relate to others and survive in social settings. Culture gives us the rules for interacting, from how to address a boss and show gratitude to how to resolve conflict and give feedback. This software also teaches you how to interpret the rules of others. For example, is the person who arrives late seen as inconsiderate, disorganized or operating with a different time orientation? Is the person who does not make eye contact seen as deceitful, under-confident or respectful? Understanding the wide range of cultural norms and preferences and their meanings is a critical element of emotional intelligence in the face of diversity. This aspect of **Intercultural Literacy** expands your knowledge of behaviors and helps you avoid the misunderstandings that can take place when you interpret them solely through your own cultural software. Seeing a wider range of possible

reasons for a particular behavior allows you to investigate beyond your initial reaction so you can “read” the other person and respond more appropriately.

### **Seeing the Benefits and Limitations of All Norms**

Culture is both pervasive and subtle at the same time. It is so much a part of who we are that it is automatic and we don't think much about it. However, the paradox of culture is that since we learn it by osmosis, we don't always know what our culture is—it's just the way things are. A fish does not understand it's in water until it is put on dry land. Being in the ocean feels right. The “oh oh” comes when it bumps up against an environment where it cannot survive. Humans have a similar experience. Your culture is usually unconscious as well until you bump up against those who do things differently and you may feel confused, irritated, uncomfortable, threatened or inadequate.

When you do experience these differences, the typical reaction is rarely curiosity. More often, we become judgmental. Statements like, “I can't trust her. She never looks me in the eye,” or “He's a very aggressive person who always invades my space. He stands way too close,” are not uncommon statements when people don't understand behaviors that underlie cultural norms. Expressing respect in Asian cultures, for example, by not looking someone in the eye is understood when one has knowledge about culture. You may not like that Middle Easterners, for example, stand much closer to one another than most U.S. Americans are comfortable with, but once you know that, you consider that it is a way to feel connected rather than thinking that your space has been invaded.

Seeing the benefits and limitations of all norms requires two behaviors. The first is to understand one's own behavior and assess how it might look from another culture's perspectives. Our famous U.S. American individualism is terrific in fostering creativity, initiative, independence and gumption, amid a host of other favorable outcomes. These same behaviors can also be seen as selfish, domineering, isolating or not being a team player from another culture's perspective.

The second behavior a successful professional needs to master is the ability to find the strength and good news in norms that you don't like. If, for example, a person from Mexico comes to a job interview and greets you with a soft handshake, a culturally literate interviewer will not dismiss this person as a timid and under-confident job applicant. Rather, that interviewer will entertain the possibility that it is culturally influenced and its purpose is to make connection and extend warmth.

Managing emotions well requires reframing not only our own cultural norms to see how they might seem less desirable to others, but also developing mental acuity or gymnastics so you can truly understand and see other possible motivations for the behaviors of others in an open, non-judgmental way. Doing so is, indeed, culturally literate behavior.

### **Transcending One's Own Perspective: Empathy**

Empathy is one of the most important skills of emotional intelligence. It is where the heart and the mind interact to create magic experiences between people. Remember for one moment the sense of connection you felt when, in a moment of distress, someone approached you and showed compassion, empathy and understanding for your sorrow.

Empathy's role in effective communication is age old. You may remember the biblical story of the tower of Babel, the lack of commitment people had toward one another, and their inability to transcend language barriers and create a common bond. You may have been told that different languages created Babel's problem. Looking at it from a different angle, it may have been that their biggest block to communication was less about their different languages than their inability to extend empathy toward one another. Had individuals been able to connect emotionally, the language differences would not have mattered.

Empathy requires you to shift your perspective to one that reflects a willingness to be genuinely receptive to another person. It challenges you to suspend any judgment towards the other and assume a position of curiosity to fully understand the situation at hand by trying to put yourself in the other person's reality. When you truly express your genuine caring for another by being empathic, you can bridge differences and connect in ways that the Tower of Babel engineers never imagined.

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## **Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Series**

### **Social Architecting: Structuring Relationships and Environment So All Can Thrive**

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For the effective professional, the fourth component of Emotional Intelligence & Diversity takes all the EID competencies and puts them together to develop a safe, hospitable, healthy and productive climate for work teams and organizations. The key premise in **Social Architecting** is that every individual in the organization has the capacity to, and responsibility for, consciously and intentionally structuring work relationships and environments to get the best from everyone. It includes the skills of resolving conflicts well, creating understanding and structuring a work environment that is dynamic and compelling. The three components of **Social Architecting** are: Serving as a Cultural Interpreter; Communicating Effectively and Resolving Conflicts in Diverse Settings and Structuring Synergistic and Compelling Environments.

#### **Serving as a Cultural Interpreter**

The benefit of not only being interculturally literate, but also using that knowledge to be a cultural interpreter, is that you can add immense value to individuals, team members and your organization by serving as a bridge who brings people together and helps them understand one another better. We saw this play out in real time. It was a fascinating example that occurred when an external consultant became a bridge builder in a health care organization that was suffering from poor management. To turn the organization around, the corporate leadership hired a skilled administrator who had a track record of success at other medical facilities. While the decisions she made and the systems she tried to institute were technically correct and should have worked, they failed because the staff resisted implementing them. What's worse, they accused her of racism and this woman, who had a long and effective career, was devastated. She was deeply wounded not only by that label but also because the problems escalated. The organization hired a consultant who served as the bridge builder. Through interviews and focus groups, the consultant found that most employees were from the same ethnic culture which was highly relational. People worked with family members and friends with whom they socialized outside of work. They expected and desired a boss who was warm, friendly, knew their names, had a sense of them and their families, and developed significant interpersonal connection. This boss, while deeply caring, came from a culture that emphasized high task accomplishment and

effective problem solving rather than relationship building. The consultant served as a cultural interpreter who helped the boss understand the cultural differences and taught her to reach out, get to know people and invest more in relationships. Once the staff felt attended to and knew the boss better, they became more open to her very worthwhile but task oriented changes. Each side gained insight and understanding that helped them work better together. There are numerous ways to ensure understanding and connection by not misinterpreting the behavior of others. One place to start is to teach people to ask one simple question: *What else could this mean?* This immediately opens up numerous possibilities and intentions. Posing that question results in understanding others better, lessening people's stress and increasing their effectiveness. That one behavior alone automatically helps develop skills as a bridge builder.

### **Communicating Effectively and Resolving Conflict in Diverse Settings**

The key to being an effective communicator in diverse settings lies in the ability to adapt your style. Some people prefer a direct, linear style while others prefer a more indirect, circular style. For some people, the message is in the words, while for others the real communication is in all the non-verbals ... who sits where at a meeting, who can come late, whose ideas and positions hold sway regardless of their merit.

Effective communication involves more than being stylistically adaptable. It also means looking for common ground across differences and resolving conflicts in a non-blaming, non-finger pointing manner. It necessitates being consciously aware of the process of communicating while acknowledging the reality that not everyone communicates like you do.

### **Structuring Synergistic and Compelling Environments**

Finally, being a social architect means that you accept your responsibility for creating the emotional climate or tone of the workplace. This is certainly the role of a leader, but the point of social architecting is that it is not solely the job of the leader. Every person in the workplace has a responsibility for making certain that the environment is emotionally safe and healthy. In such a climate, people can be fully who they are ... bring their gifts, be respectful and appreciate the many differences. Encouraging and expecting differing opinions while working together, being accountable for tasks and bringing a sense of fun and camaraderie to the workplace are what social architecting is all about.

A desirable work environment is one where employees want to show up for more than just a paycheck. It is one where leaders, managers, supervisors and employees at every level feel a responsibility for making this happen and are committed to doing so. Spelling this out so that

each employee knows how he/she can make a difference in the climate is the beginning of a great environment and increased accountability.

### **Putting Emotional Intelligence & Diversity in Perspective**

We know that human beings have emotional responses to dealing with differences. The reality that these differences can n be powerful won't change. What can change is the ability to find healthy ways of dealing with these feelings. By being an **Affirmatively Introspective** person who understands yourself, by using **Self-Governance** to manage the full range of your emotions, by demonstrating **Intercultural Literacy** through extending empathy and understanding to others and by functioning as a **Social Architect** who adds to the positive output and climate of a diverse workplace, you can find enjoyment, satisfaction and meaning in work while making full contributions to your colleagues, work group and organization.

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