

FIRO Theory: 50 Years of Emotional intelligence

Jo Maddocks



Jo Maddocks is a Chartered Occupational Psychologist and Director of product development with JCA (UK). He has developed a range of questionnaires and processes for assessing and developing Emotional intelligence.



Occupational Psychologists



Over the last 15 years the concept of Emotional intelligence (Ei) has grown in popularity and become a common theme of personal development programmes. Ei is a relatively recent term, first described as Emotional literacy by Leunen (1969), later by Mayor and Salovey which was picked up by Daniel Goleman and popularised in his bestseller *Why EQ matters more than IQ* (1996).

The roots of Ei can be traced back to Humanistic models, one of which is the FIRO theory (1958) by Will Schutz and 'The Human Element' programme (1980) he created as an application of his theory for personal development. In this article we will describe how Schutz's FIRO theory relates to Ei, and how 'The Human Element' programme continues to be applied by major organisations across the globe to develop Emotional intelligence.

Theoretical Links Between FIRO Theory and Emotional intelligence

The premise to Schutz's FIRO theory was that people orient themselves toward others along three dimensions: Inclusion (I), Control (C) and Openness (O) (see top row of fig. 1). These three dimensions can be linked to many aspects of Emotional intelligence. For example, a person who has difficulty in situation that require high levels of Inclusion may wish to develop their Ei in areas such as Regard for others, Awareness of others and Interdependence. A person who wants to be less Controlling of others may develop their Flexibility and assertiveness (to be less aggressive). And a person who tends to be overly Open may wants to develop their Emotional control and Goal directedness.

Figure 1: FIRO Theory

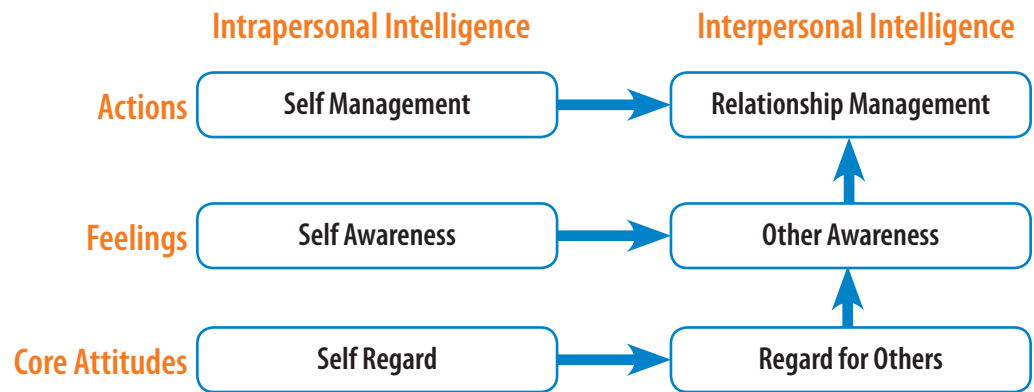
Behaviour	Inclusion	Control	Openness
Feelings	Significance	Competence	Likability
Self-Concept	Aliveness	Self-Determination	Self-Awareness
	Self Significance	Self-Competence	Self-Like

Each of these three dimensions (I,C,O) can be explored at different levels of depth from Behaviour (B), to Feelings (F), to the Self concept (S) (see fig.1 above). These parallel the framework for Ei as proposed by JCA (see fig. 2 on the next page). The Self concept (S) is reflected by our 'Core Attitudes' (bottom layer of fig. 2). Feelings (F) are identified through bodily 'Awareness of Self and Others' (middle layer of fig. 2), and Behaviours (B) are demonstrated through our 'Actions' (top layer of fig. 2)—i.e., how our thoughts and feelings manifest in what we do. In both models behaviour and performance is underpinned by feelings towards the self.

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Picking up on your own and other people's WANTS is the cornerstone to developing Ei.

Figure 2: The JCA Emotional intelligence framework



The three FIRO dimensions (I,C,O) and three levels (B,F,S) are also examined in terms of four interpersonal dynamics (What I DO, what I WANT to do, what I GET from others and what I WANT to GET from others) (see fig. 3 below).

Figure 3: The interpersonal dynamics of FIRO theory

	See	Want
Do	What I see myself do	What I want to do
Get	What I see myself get	What I want to get

The quadrants of this model can also be linked to the Ei framework. What I DO (fig. 3 top row) links to 'Intrapersonal intelligence' (shown on the left of fig. 2), which requires being in touch with your own feelings and wants and knowing what to do about that. What I GET (fig. 3 bottom row) links to 'Interpersonal intelligence' (shown on the right of fig. 2) which requires picking up what is going on in other people and between people and doing what we wish to do about that.

Furthermore, picking up on your own and other people's WANTS (right side of fig. 3) is the cornerstone to developing Ei; Self and Other awareness (middle layer of fig. 2). Being aware of what I want, like, dislike, etc is necessary, for example, to set goals, to motivate oneself, to express feelings and to learn from experience. Wants and feelings are therefore transferred into actions which are represented by Self and Relationship management on the Ei framework (see top level of fig. 2) and what I SEE happening in the FIRO model (left side of fig. 3)

Underpinning the FIRO and JCA model of Ei are a series of principles or core mindsets. Schutz describes these as useful 'tools' to facilitate change. For example, creating an atmosphere of Choice, Awareness and Openness will make it easier to make improvements in your behaviour and relationships. In Ei we find that when people behave in ways that are not Emotionally intelligent then they will be breaching one or more of these core attitudes. For example, the attitude 'each of us is responsible for our

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FIRO Theory to Ei

actions' ties in with developing the Ei scale of Personal power, and fits with the FIRO principle of 'choice' and 'self determination' in our lives. Both FIRO and Ei are grounded in a common set of core humanistic principles that form the foundation to the models, scales and methods of intervention.

One further theoretical link between both FIRO and Ei is that at the heart of any personal development is Self esteem. In FIRO theory this is examined in terms of the self concept (bottom layer of fig. 1) and defences (how we become rigid in our behaviour to protect ourselves from painful feelings)—e.g., blaming others to avoid looking at what we may not like about ourselves. In our Ei model Self esteem is unpacked through the Life positions model of Transactional Analysis. For example, how we may mask low Self regard by holding a lower Regard towards others (bottom layer of fig. 2)—e.g., being critical of people. In both FIRO and Ei models, feelings drive behaviours and the root to improving performance is through Self esteem. Self esteem are the feelings we have towards our self concept, these fuel our thoughts, affect our self and other awareness, and largely determine our behaviour and Emotional intelligence.

Finally, it is worth recognising that Ei is a verb and therefore is changeable and in the moment. The FIRO and JCA Ei questionnaires both reflect this by measuring aspects of 'state' rather than 'trait'. This contrasts to personality measures which focus on stable traits or type behaviours (practical way of defining Ei is, 'how we manage our personality to be both personally and interpersonally effective'). This means that the scores one gets on these questionnaires can change and provides an indication of how a person is right now or how they may have changes over a period of time.

Study 1: A correlation between FIRO Element B and the Individual Effectiveness (ie) Questionnaire

A Statistical study was completed to examine the relationship between the 16 'ie'* scales of Ei and the FIRO Element B (n= 81 p<0.05).

The themes that emerged from this were:

(FIRO Element B scales are in **bold**)

- People who are more **inclusive** tend to have higher regard for others, be more aware of others, more flexible and trusting.
- People who are higher on **control of others** tend to be higher on personal power and more interdependent.
- People who are being **controlled by others** tend to be more trusting and passive.
- People who are more **open** tend to be more self and other aware, more personally connected and goal directed.

* Individual Effectiveness questionnaire based on the JCA model of emotional intelligence.



The Human Element programme engages people through a range of experiences that involve thinking about feeling and feeling about thinking to guide what we do, which is our definition of Emotional intelligence.

The Applied Links Between The Human Element and Emotional intelligence

For nearly 30 years FIRO theory has been applied through a programme called 'The Human Element' (THE) within organisations such as NASA, P&G and AT&T. 'The Human Element' applies many of the approaches now used in the field of Emotional intelligence.

A key aspect of THE is that learning takes place experientially, generally through interactive activities that engage people at an emotional level. Advances in brain science can now explain why this approach is the most effective way to make sustainable change. For example, people often know what they should do, yet still revert back to their old behaviours after skills training. This is because *knowing* about something lives in a different part of the brain from that which makes us *want* to do something (LeDoux, J. 2003). The motivation to behave in a certain way comes from the limbic brain and is fuelled by feelings. The Limbic part of the brain learns from emotional experience, while the 'knowing' part of the brain learns from thinking. Developing Emotional intelligence requires experiential activities, from actually *doing* something, often repeatedly so that it becomes a habit. Of course, it is necessary to do the right thing which requires a certain amount of self knowledge also. THE programme engages people through a range of experiences including face to face feedback, non verbal group activities, reflective discussions, questionnaire data, and visualization. All these activities involve using thinking about feeling and feeling about thinking to guide what we do, which is our definition of Emotional intelligence.

Examples

A visualisation exercise will typically invite the person to imagine carrying out an action such as walking along a beach, feeling the sand and water in your toes, looking at the sunset and hearing seagulls, etc. This engages our key senses: visual, auditory and kinesthetic, which is processed at an emotional (limbic brain) level—i.e., we have an emotional connection with the experience. The limbic brain does not distinguish between real and imagined and is therefore a 'reality generator.' It is for this reason that we can actively use our imagination to create positive intentions, motivate ourselves, physically relax and engage our unconscious brain in directing us towards the future we want to create. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true if we allow our imagination to exaggerate problems, perpetuate anxiety, and anticipate the worst.

Another form of intervention used within THE and Ei is 360 degree feedback. Usually feedback of this sort is done anonymously. In THE we invite people to give feedback face to face, where at least four people provide the feedback to one person. Before this can be done, considerable preparation is done so that the giver and receiver are coming from a position of Value towards the other person (especially if the feedback is 'negative'). The impact from these conversations is invariably highly personal and meaningful at an emotional level, as opposed to anonymous feedback which invariably engages the receiver in a cognitive analysis of 'who said that' and justification for why they may be wrong.

A third Ei approach used within THE programme is nonverbal activity. Talking is predominately a cognitive process and may be a distraction from experiencing feelings which live in the body. We would generally encourage people to do something

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wherever possible than say something. Having people turn their back on you while wanting to enter a conversation, lying on the floor while others look down on you, or positioning yourself in a line of people according to how dominant you see yourself are some examples of this. Such activities will usually leave a far deeper emotional memory than would a conversation.

Study 2: Linking THE intervention with Ei development

In order to demonstrate the benefit of these types of interventions on Emotional intelligence we have collated data on 36 people who attended THE programme and measured their EQ using the JCA 'ie' questionnaire before and three months after attending THE programme. Although the sample size was small, the results were impressive. Fourteen of the fifteen Ei scales increased by at least 1 decile (10%) and 6 scales by 2 deciles (20%) and 3 scales by 3 deciles (30%) based on an average of all participants. The highest increase by three deciles were Emotional resilience, conflict handling and interdependence.

Conclusion

There is much we can learn from Will Schutz's FIRO theory and THE in applying the concept of Ei. This year (2008) is the 50th anniversary of his original work, which has not only stood the test of time but has proven to be ahead of its time. FIRO theory provides an elegant and profound explanation for Ei upon which THE programme offers interventions that are entirely consistent with the most effective applications of Emotional intelligence.)

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