



EQ AND LEADERSHIP IN ASIA

*Using Emotional
Intelligence
to Lead and Inspire
Your People*

SEBASTIEN HENRY

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An Imprint of

 WILEY

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This edition is published by John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd., 1 Fusionopolis Walk, #07-01, Solaris South Tower, Singapore 138628 on behalf of Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint.

989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741—www.josseybass.com

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Jossey-Bass also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN 978-0-470-82986-8 (Hardback)

ISBN 978-0-470-82988-2 (e-PDF)

ISBN 978-0-470-82987-5 (e-Mobi)

ISBN 978-0-470-82989-9 (e-Pub)

Typeset in 10/13 Meridien by MPS Limited, a Macmillan Company
Printed in Singapore by Saik Wah Print Media Pte. Ltd.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Acknowledgments

It is no coincidence that I chose to specialize in emotional intelligence in leadership. I had the immense chance to live for 20 years close to an inspiring role model: a leader with a big heart and a strong backbone, respected as a leader and appreciated as a person. Contributing to develop more leaders with big hearts and strong backs is inspiring and rewarding to me. I feel grateful to have received this precious teaching from my father, Michel. I also want to thank my mother, Catherine, for being a constant role model of living connected to one's heart.

Thank you also to:

Diane Wilcoxson and Benoit Foucher, my dear sparring partners, with whom I have shared so many inspirations. Franck Peng, who has helped me a lot with his deep understanding of both Chinese and Western culture, combined with his generosity. Pierre-Gilles Henry, my brother, who (apart from being a talented neuroscientist) also has a big heart and has supported me with his precious feedback at every step in the writing process. Charlie Lang, my business partner for five years now, who was the first one to encourage me to write this book. Phil Sandhal, for his great support and guidance. And all of those who kindly agreed to offer me some of their time to answer my questions:

Sabreena Andriesz

Xavier Bertrand (Chanel India)

Walter Carvalho (Bayer MaterialScience Asia Pacific)

Johnny Chow

Philippe Dreano (Pernod-Ricard)

Michael Gutman

Dr. Sunil Kumar (Gautam Buddha University, India)

Bashiru Ibrahim

Yin Lam

Helen Lim

Christina Lu (Volvo)

Remi Lugagne (L'Oreal Japan)

Yumi Owada

Maria Pressentin

Yuva Rajah

Francois Rameau (Credit Agricole Investment Banking Hong Kong)

Jean-Paul Riby

Tony Russell (L'Oreal)

Trevor Sculthorpe-Pike (ICV China)

Ashis Sen (Hindustan Petroleum Corporation)

Dr. Vinod Shanwal (Gautam Buddha University, India)

Prakash Sharma

Vidhu Sharma (Diebold Asia Pacific)

Asha Shridar

Shenton Sng

Shalini Srivastava

Christine Sun (Johnson and Johnson China)

Ronald Tay (UBS)

Simon Wong

Wilianto Wu (Gemalto)

And, last but not least, I am grateful to Anne-Claire for her continuous loving support throughout the whole journey.

Preface

I have thought of writing this book many times, whenever my clients asked me to recommend a book on emotional intelligence (EI).¹

Since I immersed myself in work on emotions (in 1998, over a decade ago), I have read dozens of books related to EI. Some were really good, but none were complete enough to meet my clients' needs. I needed one book, and only one book, since my clients don't read much. They have no time to read, or they have other priorities.

They are interested in improving the way they lead their people and are open to new concepts, but only a limited amount of theory suits them. They need highly practical tools that will make a difference in their daily work. Besides, since all of them work in Asia, and many are Asian, they need a particular angle on the way they do business in Asia, and how EI can make sense for them in this environment.

Therefore, the book that would suit them would have to include the following:

- A clear and concise overview of what EI is and why it matters, especially in Asia
- Some essential concepts to enable them to lead with a deeper view of relationships with their team members
- A series of practical tools to enable them to use emotions as resources in typical challenging situations they have to face

I have written this book with these requirements in mind, and this has been my ultimate objective the whole time I was writing.

Another objective was to share my passion for emotions. Emotions are colorful, vibrant, often surprising, and—what matters most for a leader—immense resources when it comes to leading people.

TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS BOOK . . .

This section provides a recap of each chapter, to give you a quick overview of the content of the book. All chapters in Part Two can be read independently, so you can go directly to the ones that address your particular challenges. In addition, throughout the book, I have added short features that provide more detailed information, and others that suggest some practical exercises to help bring the content to life.



This sign marks sections where more detailed information is provided for those who want to go deeper.



This sign marks sections dedicated to practice. In the field of emotional intelligence, practice is absolutely crucial. How much you get out of this book will simply depend on how much you practice. Here is an outline of the contents:



Part One: Understanding Emotional Intelligence in Asia

Chapter 1: Does It Make Sense to Write About EI in Asia? Asia is a huge continent with an amazing variety of national cultures, and several of its countries are themselves host to many subcultures. This makes covering the topic of emotional intelligence in Asia without producing annoying stereotypes very challenging. To avoid generalizations and stereotypes, some clear lines of direction have to be set.

Chapter 2: EI and Why It Matters in Asia. Many studies have produced massive evidence that EI is crucial for leadership in other environments.

I believe it is even more crucial in Asia, where emotions tend to be hidden beneath the surface of daily business interactions. Emotions are precious assets for a leader when wisely used, and become a source of disruption if ignored.

Chapter 3: The Various Facets of EI: Four Areas to Develop. There are several models of emotional intelligence, all of them developed in the West. The most common of these models defines four areas of EI, all of which are important for a leader. They can be developed simultaneously, since they complement each other.

Chapter 4: EI Is Not about Being Nice and Sweet. Emotional Intelligence is partly being sensitive to people's emotions and having empathy. But it can also mean at times being enforcing, sharp, and even fierce when the situation commands. It is not about being nice, sweet, and spineless.

Chapter 5: Asia's Contribution to EI: The Power of Paradox. Asia's thinking doesn't ignore paradoxes: it turns them into harmony, as both parts of the paradox can be reconciled. This ability to reconcile paradoxes proves very useful when it comes to emotional intelligence, because it means that we don't have to compromise.

Chapter 6: Using Both Masculine and Feminine Energies. Everyone, whether male or female, has both masculine and feminine energy, but one type is usually dominant. This creates emotional patterns that can be limiting. Developing flexibility in using these two energies gives us a wider emotional range, enabling us to handle all kinds of challenging situations.

Chapter 7: Four Steps to Develop Your Emotional Intelligence. Developing emotional intelligence stands midway between art and science. Unlike logical intelligence (the capacity measured by IQ tests), it can be developed significantly. Although there is no fixed recipe, four essential steps can be identified:

- Assessing your present EI level
- Selecting one or two behaviors to work on
- Practicing these behaviors while putting elements of accountability in place
- Assessing achievements

Part Two: Using Emotions as Allies in Practical Leadership Challenges

Once we choose to use emotions as allies, they prove precious in a large number of business situations we encounter as leaders in Asia. In this second part, I review the most common situations where emotions can be your allies.

Chapter 8: Choosing to Use Emotions as Allies. Emotions are part of daily life. They keep surfacing daily, whether we want them or not. We can choose to see them as disruptions that we have to minimize, ignore them, or use them as allies to handle leadership issues that we have to face. Using them as allies requires a consistent effort to know them well.

Chapter 9: Preventing Damaging Emotional Outbursts. Team members don't expect their leaders to be emotionless business animals. They will usually accept our emotional fluctuations. However, frequent or intense emotional outbursts will tend to alienate people and damage our credibility, particularly in Asia. Paying close attention to the early stages of incoming waves of emotion can help prevent damaging emotional outbursts.

Chapter 10: Emotions to Create High Engagement. Lack of motivation in team members can have various reasons, but emotional issues sometimes play a major part. Making an effort to understand these emotional issues can unlock seemingly hopeless situations. It can lead to high engagement, far deeper and longer lasting than mere temporary motivation. At a time when the struggle to find and retain talent in Asia shows no sign of abating, ability in this area gives you a competitive advantage as a leader.

Chapter 11: EI for Getting Things Done and Making Tough Decisions. What sometimes stops us from enforcing a policy or making a tough decision is our fear that our people may not like us. This fear may be subconscious, but it is still potent. Closely monitoring our own emotions at the very moment when we are about to retreat from enforcing decisions, as well as attending to emotions in our team members, opens the door to enforcement that preserves healthy relationships.

Chapter 12: Emotions as Keys for a Way out of Conflict. Conflicts are the perfect ground for emotions to grow and prosper. Emotional outbreaks in conflicts tend to fuel them in return. It is easy to see emotions as troublemakers in conflicts. However, they can also be the keys for a way

out that is satisfying for all parties. In Asia, these keys are a bit harder to find than in Europe or in the United States, but they work beautifully.

Chapter 13: Emotions to Lead Your Team to the High-Performance Zone. Many teams are functioning well; some are dysfunctional. But very few are truly performing at the highest level. There is often a significant gap between the level of performance that a team could potentially achieve and what it is actually achieving. Facilitating genuine and appropriate emotional expression in your team is one of the greatest ways to bridge this gap and lead your team to the high-performance zone. However, because attention to emotion is not common practice in Asia, the effort will require courage, patience, and dedication.

Chapter 14: Emotions and Intuition for Effective Decision Making. Emotions are messengers. They carry messages that it's best to pay attention to, especially when it comes to making decisions. At the same time, they occasionally tend to lead us to unwise decisions. It then proves invaluable to learn to tap into an even deeper resource: our intuition.

Conclusion. It's time for action!

Review of books. In case you may wish to pursue further reading on topics related to emotional intelligence and leadership in Asia, the book concludes with brief reviews of a number of the best books in the area.

NOTE

1. *Emotional intelligence*(EI) is the general term for the topic under discussion here. The abbreviation *EQ*, used in the title, actually refers only to "Emotional Quotient," a measure of EI—but for some reason, it is better known and more easily recognized than EI itself. Thus, it makes sense to use *EQ* in the title, but *EI* in the rest of the text.

Part One

Understanding Emotional
Intelligence in Asia

1

DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO WRITE ABOUT EI IN ASIA?

“Writing about emotional intelligence in Asia means covering an area comprising countries that are extremely different, from Japan, Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Korea to Singapore. Each country in Asia has its own treasures and ways. Many countries also have subcultures that are as different from one another and from the majority culture as the countries are from one another.”

China, for instance, has more than 50 official minorities whose cultures have a history just as long and rich as that of the Han people. Singapore has developed a unique blend of the Malay, Indian, and Chinese cultures. Indonesia is reported to have more than 250 ethnic groups, speaking about 550 languages (approximately a 10th of all languages in the world).

In addition to these differences, there are significant generational changes going on in many countries in the area. To take the example of China, managers in their 40s find it very challenging to relate to their youngest direct reports, born in the late 80s. One of my clients, a well-known multinational company with massive presence in China, recently consulted me to develop a program on emotional intelligence designed to help these two generations work together more effectively.

Each of the countries and cultures in Asia would actually deserve a separate study when it comes to emotional intelligence. Nobody would challenge this need for Europe. French or German people would certainly resent being integrated in a study covering all other countries in Europe. Although this point is immediately obvious to anyone living in Asia, it is worth reminding other readers that Asian countries have a depth and history that many countries in the world could envy.

Therefore, setting coverage of the whole area as a goal means running the risk of staying at the surface, and—worse—of falling into the trap of mass-producing stereotypes. Either would quickly convince you to put this book down, and I would not blame you for that. This is a risk that can't be denied, and one I have kept in mind over the two years I spent writing this book.

At the same time, being aware of danger is the best way to avoid it. I have adopted several important precautions to make sure that I would not flirt too much with this danger.

First, this book is limited to the topic of leadership. It is a book for leaders, not for educators or artists (although they may still enjoy it). I would never have written on emotional intelligence and education in Asia, because I hardly know anything about that line of work. But, through 10 years of living and working in Asia as a leader myself, then as an executive coach and trainer specializing in emotional intelligence, I have accumulated extensive direct experience of how emotions are handled by leaders in Asia.

To be more specific, the main focus in this book will be multinational companies in Asia, because this is the field I know best. Restricting myself to this field was important to me, as I am well aware that I don't have a direct experience of what is happening in purely local companies. In Singapore and Hong Kong, for instance, there is often a world of difference between a Chinese-owned local company or an Indian-owned company and a multinational.

In both cases, the vast majority of the staff is still local, but the leadership style and the way emotions are handled differ a lot. Most multinationals have made some effort to define their corporate culture, which includes the behaviors and values they would like to see in their leaders wherever they are based. Any local leader in any country in Asia has to adjust to this culture to some extent. In particular, as many multinational companies have started implementing some EI-based leadership development programs worldwide, local managers have to follow the trend, which was launched in the West and is based on

Western concepts. This is certainly a stretch, and at the same time my experience is that many local leaders are doing pretty well.

Second, I decided to put more emphasis on what Asian cultures have in common, rather than on their differences. Any local leader I have talked with finds it important to specify that his culture is significantly different from the culture of neighboring countries. This is of course quite legitimate. At the same time, from the point of view of an outsider like me (a Westerner, that is), most countries in Asia have several traits in common, and these traits happen to have a close relation to the issue of emotional intelligence.

In many cultures in Asia, there is a tendency to look for harmony that can't be found to the same degree in Europe or in the United States: harmony within oneself and harmony within groups one belongs to, for example, a family or a team. Linked to this search for harmony is the ideal of self-restraint: maintaining a calm state of mind in any situation, however testing it might be. Discussing in detail the origins of these traits would take me too far from the scope of this book, but it seems obvious that Buddhism and Taoism, the two religions that have had the deepest impact in the region, have contributed to shape these traits. In both religions, harmony and self-restraint play a large role. These two ideals have a direct relation to the way emotions are handled. For example, by giving priority to harmony in your team, you might not express negative emotions with the same strength as you would if harmony didn't matter that much.

Last, I decided to limit my scope of investigation to the countries in Asia I know best. Through my 10 years of living and working in Asia, I have had the chance to work with people from pretty much every country. But I can't claim deep understanding of the culture of each country. I can't even claim deep understanding of the culture of the two countries I know best: China and Japan. I can speak and read both languages and have spent many years trying to understand their cultures, but I still have to say that there is much more that I don't understand than what I do. Each country has a culture that is so vast and so complex that claiming to have a good grasp of it doesn't come easily. Far from being sobering, this is exciting to me. It means that there is always something new I can learn, and that there is always room for surprises.

China (mainland and Hong Kong) and Japan represent the largest part of my direct experience in Asia. South-East Asia and India come second. To be more specific, among countries of South-East Asia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia are the most familiar to me. But as my knowledge

of their culture is not as developed as that of China and Japan, I completed my research with dozens of interviews with local leaders and specialists.

I hesitated for some time before including India in the scope of this book. Nonetheless, several arguments pulled me in the same direction and convinced me to make it part of the picture. Some people would claim that India is not really part of Asia—they say it is a continent in itself, and making it a piece of Asia is reducing it to something smaller than it is. But on the other side, I could observe Indian team members in many regional teams I have worked with. In many multinational companies in Asia, India is definitely integrated in regional operations. Additionally, Indian leaders and team members are often based in other countries, for example in Hong Kong, and more and more in mainland China. For anyone working in a multinational company in Asia, there is a fair chance to be dealing with Indian colleagues. Finally, I have a lot of respect and interest for the Indian culture, and including India in my study was just too attractive.

When asking myself if writing on emotional intelligence and leadership in Asia really made sense, I also addressed the question of how deep I could go. As mentioned in the Preface, I had the intention right from the start to write this book for people like my clients: leaders who need practical tools and don't have much time to read. I wanted to condense in one book all the information on EI they need to make a difference in the way they lead their people, including many practical tools. Because of this intention, I had somehow to give up the idea of going into much detail. But going into detail and going deep are two different things. I still set my intention on reaching some depth of understanding, which means to me inviting readers to ask themselves questions that they have never considered before.

With these considerations in mind, I am sincerely convinced that this project makes sense and will bring value to leaders in Asia who want to have an understanding of how to make conscious use of emotions (their own emotions and the emotions of their team members). At the same time, I am fully aware of the limits of this work. There is so much I still want to clarify and research further. As I said in the Preface, I am truly passionate about the emotional dimension of leadership in Asia. I can see myself exploring the field, both through practice and research, for another decade or more. Hopefully this will lead me to another book that will be built on this one, like an additional story in a Chinese pavilion. And I sincerely hope that other authors will add their own story to the pavilion too.