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## Embedding emotional intelligence into military training contexts

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### Abstract

Even the most junior Warfighters must effectively interact and negotiate with locals from communities that do not share their religious beliefs, social perspectives or customs. These cultural differences introduce a layer of uncertainty into chaotic operational contexts that are marked by moments of intense stress, and often contribute to strong emotional responses such as anxiety or anger. Unchecked, these emotional responses can escalate and lead Warfighters to make judgments and decisions they might not otherwise make. In high stakes situations, even the slightest mistake may have tragic consequences; thus, a need exists to equip Warfighters with skills that allow them to recognize/regulate their emotions. Emotional Intelligence (EI) “is the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” [1]. Learning effective strategies to manage our emotions is critical for laying a strong foundation for the development of positive relationships [2][3]. Being able to effectively build positive relationships in diverse settings is a key attribute of cross cultural competence that may be improved through EI training. By practicing emotion recognition/regulation strategies, individuals will begin to replace ineffective decision-making with productive responses to challenging situations. In order to understand how emotions can influence decision making and social judgment, various moderating factors need to be considered, including cultural, group, and individual differences in emotional recognition/regulation [4]. We provide a brief overview of the operational need, define the basic tenets of EI, and describe how this approach could be implemented within an existing military training setting. We describe how emotion recognition and regulation skills would be exercised and evaluated and list potential benefits of using immersive training for skill development. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for future research and development in this area.

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## 1. Introduction

The expression, experience, and influence of emotion in daily life, as well as within the intense conditions of certain situations, are central components of the human experience; for better or worse, emotions are part of the human dimension landscape. One of the latent goals of traditional training systems is to provide a level of performance mastery that enables the Warfighter to perform well, even under conditions producing intense emotion. Military personnel, civilian emergency first responders, hospital emergency room personnel, civilian transport pilots, power plant managers, and many other operators must often perform under conditions that require the ability to cognitively manage emotions while operating effectively.

This research investigates theory and application of emotional intelligence and how it can be used to improve human performance in both kinetic and non-kinetic operations. We focus on areas for training or improving training that takes into account emotion as it influences (a) the training process itself and (b) the performance of the Warfighter in real world situations. Although targeted to solve training problems related to effective decision making, the study also explores emotion recognition and regulation skills associated with several forms of human interaction as a specific area of training. This training will improve the interpersonal skills needed to interact, lead, and encourage one's own team, and read/gauge and interact with related (non-combatant) persons. The ubiquitous and cross-cultural nature of many aspects of emotion give the opportunity to develop a set of broadly useful skills that enhance the effectiveness of interpersonal interactions within the socio-cultural milieu.

## 2. Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) “is the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions”[1]. Indeed, emotions are fundamental to cognitive processes and social behaviors, and are a driving force of attention, motivation, learning, and relationships. Emotion and cognition are interdependent; emotions can be used to leverage cognition and emotions can be cognitively managed, but skills are needed. In their theory of EI, Salovey and Mayer [1] posit that there are individual differences in the ability to use emotions to inform cognition and in the ability to regulate the intensity of emotions as well as the effects of emotion on behavior.

The feelings we have affect our ability to learn and interact with others. Learning effective strategies for managing our emotions and helping others manage theirs is critical for laying a strong foundation for the development of positive relationships [2][3]. Being able to effectively build positive relationships in diverse settings is a key attribute of cross cultural competence that may be improved through EI training.

There are four distinct but interrelated skills that comprise EI -- *recognizing emotions*, *using emotions to facilitate thinking*, *understanding emotions*, and *regulating emotions*. The current work will center on recognizing and regulating emotions, as these skills will offer the most to Warfighters in terms of enhancing leadership training and improving performance. *Recognizing emotions* represents the ability to accurately perceive emotions in oneself and in others, and to express emotions appropriately according to social and cultural norms, while *regulating emotions* in a functional way promotes emotional and intellectual growth in oneself and in others. Individuals who are skilled at recognizing and regulating their emotions practice discretion in their actions, and understand which regulation strategies to employ in him/herself and in others, in order to enhance or moderate specific emotions [5][6]. For example, an individual who is highly aroused during a stressful task may recognize this and will subsequently employ a quick and effective strategy to down regulate in order to be in an emotional state that's more conducive for critical thinking and productivity.

### 2.1. Role of EI in human behavior

Emotions influence thinking, decision-making, relationships and mental health, and success both within and outside of work environments. To understand how emotions can influence decision making and social judgment, various moderating factors should be considered, including culture and group and individual differences in emotional recognition and regulation [4]. EI training helps individuals handle strong emotions so they make better decisions for themselves and their teams. By practicing emotion regulation strategies over time, individuals will begin to replace ineffective emotional responses/decision-making with productive and empowering responses to

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