

RQ Dimension – Interpersonal Competence

About this Dimension

What is *Interpersonal Competence* as a component of resilience?

Interpersonal Competence is an individual's ability to understand and empathize with other people and their circumstances. Resilient people tend to demonstrate the competencies of what, in recent years, has been defined as "emotional intelligence." Emotional intelligence in an individual suggests a high level of self and social awareness and the ability to use this awareness to effectively manage themselves and their relationships with others.

Interpersonal Competence, like emotional intelligence, is comprised of four core aspects:

- The first is **self-awareness**. For this component of Interpersonal Competence, the individual is keenly aware of his or her internal emotional state, preferences, and tendencies. People who are self-aware are attuned to their inner signals, recognizing how their feelings affect them and their relationships with others. People with high self-awareness typically know their limitations and strengths, and exhibit a sense of humor about themselves.
- The second aspect of Interpersonal Competence is **self-management**. For this component, self-management or self-control is not the elimination of one's emotions but taking action such that the person controls his or her emotions vs. the emotions controlling him or her. A hallmark of self-control is the person who stays calm and clear-headed under high stress or during a crisis – or who remains unflappable even when confronted by a trying situation.
- **Social awareness** is the third component of Interpersonal Competence. Empathy plays a key role in this component. People with empathy are able to listen attentively and attune to a wide range of emotional signals from others and to grasp another person's perspective. This enables them, in turn, to sense the felt, but often unspoken, emotions in a person or group. A person with a keen social awareness can be politically astute, able to detect crucial social networks, and read key power relationships.
- The fourth and final aspect of this RQ dimension is **relationship management**. This critical integrating component enables the individual to translate insight into self and others, through self-management and social awareness, into effective and enduring relationships. Those who are effective at relationship management are able to read the emotional requirements of others and to transform this awareness into strong social connections based upon empathy, trust, and interdependence.

Why is this Dimension Important to Resilience?

Interpersonal Competence is important to resilience because it is through strong and interdependent relationships with others that we are able to more successfully rise to meet life's challenges. And, because building strong relationships depends upon emotional intelligence, strengthening one's Interpersonal Competence is central to enhancing personal resilience.

Through Interpersonal Competence, resilient people are able to transcend their personal challenges and setbacks by leveraging their relationships with others into personal insights

and stronger self-confidence. An individual's ability to "roll with the punches" becomes far easier when others offer empathy and support—something that's more likely when the person has displayed Interpersonal Competence in his or her relations with others.

Without Interpersonal Competence, a person is likely to feel estranged from others and a victim of his or her own emotional volatility. People who lack Interpersonal Competence would tend to be driven by their emotions and therefore subject to emotional upheavals that can lead to anxiety and depression. This, in turn, makes it more difficult for these individuals to take setbacks in stride, to laugh at themselves, or to stay focused on personal goals. People lacking interpersonal also have a difficult time reading the emotional needs of others, which leads to limited empathy or the ability to truly connect with another person.

Interpersonal Competence Quotes

You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you do not trust enough.

— Dr. Frank Crane

Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.

— Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss), American children's author (b. 1904, d. 1991)

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.

— Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist (b. 1875, d. 1961)

Anybody can become angry, that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way, that is not within everybody's power, that is not easy.

— Aristotle, Greek philosopher (b. 384 BCE, d. 322 BCE)

Strategies for Developing the Interpersonal Competence Dimension

Developing Interpersonal Competence involves strategies for developing insight into the emotional make-up of oneself and others and then methods for translating this insight into self- and relationship-management. Efforts to strengthen Interpersonal Competence are wholly dependent upon an individual's ability to be introspective, be open to the need for changing how one interacts with others, and be able to modify one's behavior and interactions with others to accommodate their emotional requirements.

Some ideas to encourage people to strengthen their Interpersonal Competence dimension include:

On a personal, one-on-one basis . . .

- Encourage the person to enhance his or her awareness of his or her emotional makeup. Have the person do any the following:
 - *Make two lists. (a) First make a list of things, kinds of people, and situations that attract you. What are you attracted to? What do you find interesting and compelling? And then (b) make a list of things, kinds of people, and situations that you tend to avoid. What do you find unattractive? What repels you? What*

do you try to avoid at all cost? Finally, (c) identify why you feel attracted or repulsed by these things. How do these attractors/detractors make you feel? Do these feelings ever get in the way of your judgment about things, situations, and people? Are you able to rise above your emotional response to these situations?

- *Think of a time when you were really really angry. What caused you to feel this strongly about something? How did this anger translate into your behaviors? Were you able or not able to set aside this anger when you needed to in order to move on in the relationship/situation? What did you do that enabled you to move on – or what prevented you from moving on? What insights about yourself emerge from this assessment of these emotions of frustration and anger?*
- *Describe a situation where you felt joyful, playful, elated, or peaceful. What caused you to have these feelings? What actions did you take in this situation or in relation to others that led to these positive emotions? What insights about yourself emerge from this assessment of your positive/affirming emotions?*
- Encourage the person to enhance his or her awareness of the emotional state of others. Have the person do any the following:
 - *Identify someone with whom you interact on a regular basis. What are the things, situations, and people that this person is attracted to/drawn toward? What are the things, situations, and people that this person is repelled by and tends to avoid? What are the signs in this other person that indicate attraction or repulsion? To what extent have you ever tested out your assumptions about what this person likes or dislikes? How does your perception of this other person's likes/dislikes influence your own relationship with this person? To what extent do you modify/shape your own interactions with this person to accommodate his or her likes/dislikes? What insights about yourself emerge from this reflection upon another person's likes/dislikes?*
 - *Think of a recent situation where you sensed that someone you were interacting with was unhappy or frustrated – but didn't directly tell you so. What led you to believe that the person was frustrated/unhappy with you or the situation? Were there specific behaviors or mannerisms that caused you to suspect the other person's emotional state? To what extent do you typically pay attention to these behaviors and mannerisms? Did you "test out" your perceptions/assumptions about the other person's emotional state with that person? How did you test out this perception? If you didn't test out this assumption/perception, why not? What insights about yourself emerge from this assessment of your own ability to accurately read another person's emotional state?*
- Ask the person to identify one thing that he or she could do enable him or her to be more aware of his or her own emotional state and its response to different situations and people.
- Invite the person to identify the single greatest obstacle that he or she sees to successfully managing his or her emotions effectively vs. his or her emotions controlling him or her.

- If an individual is facing a significant challenge or crisis, guide him or her in reflecting upon *what* he or she is feeling as he or she faces this challenge and to identify one or two actions that he or she could take to ensure a healthy, learning-centered, and positive emotional response to this situation.

Either on a one-on-one basis or when facilitating a group discussion . . .

- Use any of the activities from the one-on-one list above, inviting individuals to first work by themselves and then to partner with another person in the workshop and to share and gather feedback on their ideas.
- If the group has identified a set of problems or challenges facing the team or organization, organize the larger group into small discussion groups to identify their *feelings* about this challenging situation and how these feelings influence their reactions to the situation. Then ask the group to identify some constructive actions that they could take (individually and collectively) to channel their emotional energy toward a positive outcome as they face this challenge.
- Guide workshop participants in developing a *Personal Action Plan* for identifying and exploring their emotional responses to a specific problem or challenge that they are facing in their work or life. This Action Plan should identify the problem that they are facing, their emotional response to this situation, how their emotional response influences their behaviors, and the specific steps that they will take to ensure a healthy emotional response to this situation. Invite participants to partner up with another person in the room with whom they can share, discuss, and revise his or her action plan. Following the workshop, the facilitator may want to check in with participants (via e-mail, phone call, or face-to-face interaction) to inquire as to the progress the person is making toward building their Interpersonal Competence.
- In a workshop setting, ask participants to work in small groups to identify “hot buttons” that can sometimes lead people to act in ways that are counterproductive to healthy interactions with others. Once the small groups report out their “hot buttons,” invite the small groups to identify positive actions that individuals can take when others push these hot buttons.