

# **Intelligent Emotions Management: Insights and Strategies for Managers and Leaders**

Leigh Kibby\*  
Kinematic Pty Ltd

<http://www.kinematic.com.au>

Email: [leigh@kinematic.com.au](mailto:leigh@kinematic.com.au) **OR** [lkibby@bigpond.net.au](mailto:lkibby@bigpond.net.au)

Phone: +61 3 5222 7578

Fax: +61 3 **5222 7578**

Professor Charmine E.J. Härtel

Centre for Business Research

Deakin Business School

Deakin University

Malvern

Victoria, Australia 3144

[Email: hartel@deakin.edu.au](mailto:hartel@deakin.edu.au)

Phone: +61 3 9244 5537

Fax: +61 3 9244 5544

\* PLEASE NOTE: All contact should be made with the first author.

# **Intelligent Emotions Management: Insights and Strategies for Managers and Leaders**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, we introduce the Language, Emotion and Thought (LET) model for explaining the relationship between language, emotions and thought. Based on the model, we adduce a strategy for understanding emotions and emotional intelligence, working with emotions intelligently, measuring emotional intelligence and assisting the enactment of values driven behaviour. We demonstrate that intelligent emotion management comprises both a cross-culture function as well as a relationship building function. It is cross-cultural in the sense that the affective domain may have a culture and language of its own and, it is a relationship building function in that it establishes a common understanding for shared communication. The LET model provides a tool to assist managers in using the right key for opening the emotions door.

# **Intelligent Emotions Management:**

## **Insights and Strategies for Managers and Leaders**

Human beings are a complex combination of thoughts, emotions/feelings and physiology. To deny this, means denying what makes us human. Workplaces who refute this, or fail to incorporate these ideas into their practices, are open to questions about their ethics. However, embracing the full gambit of the human condition can help organisations and their people reach new levels of social and task performance or, at the least, reduce dissatisfaction and disharmony. The key to the betterment of ourselves and our organizations, therefore, is to work with thoughts and emotions in a way that liberates without chaos, accepts without judgement and enables without commanding. These are the elements of what we refer to throughout this paper as intelligent emotions management.

In this paper, we introduce a model for explaining the relationship between language, emotions and thought. From that model, we can then adduce a strategy for understanding emotions and emotional intelligence, working with emotions intelligently, measuring emotional intelligence and assisting the enactment of values driven behaviour.

A model for the thought-emotion-human condition is important because it can lead to a greater facility with the affective domain and therefore also lead to the improved well-being and health of individuals (Spiegel, 1999), as well as providing a window into a new way to perceive management and leadership including concepts about emotions and workplaces. The former is imperative for managers of people, the latter is an ethical stance that may become enacted in legislation as organisations become more accountable for the health and well-being of their employees. In fact, if

organisations are seeking improved performance under more stressful conditions in the global economy, then the level of well-being will either facilitate or inhibit effective decision-making and action and reducing stress.

The model proposed in this paper links Language, Emotion and Thought (LET), language being a vehicle for the expression of thought and emotion (discussed later). Well-being can be developed through an understanding of LET and values based action can be facilitated through LET. This will enable low levels of stress to produce a “well-functioning” human being (Lazarus, 1991; 168).

In terms of managing people, it is crucial to understand and utilise the internal and external mechanisms for managing our thoughts and emotions i.e. LET. Also, interaction between human beings, and human beings interacting with the world around them, requires an ability to understand that interaction, both its cognitive and affective elements. In fact, life and human interaction are enabled and regulated through a social/emotional intelligence where "...social intelligence involves the ability to construct multiple alternatives of a situation and use affective appraisal and emotional regulation as coping mechanisms..." (Frances Blanchard-Fields, 1996). This ability is required in both social (non-work) and work settings. However, the ability to construct and appraise are reliant upon conscious awareness of emotions, and self-reflective thought, which requires language.

For managers and leaders, there also needs to be an entry, or engagement, point into a person's inner emotional and cognitive world when emotions are running high and preventing clear thought or harming well-being (self and others). Language is an obvious choice as it provides the opportunity for both emotions and thoughts to be ‘seen’ through their externalisation and expression.

The next step in this paper is then is to briefly review why emotions are important for managers and leaders. (i.e. the impact of emotions on the workplace) and then explore LET.

## **Emotions and The Workplace**

Emotions have an impact, which can be detrimental, on work and workplace behaviour. Affective Events Theory (Fisher, Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2001 ) postulates the impact of emotional state on behaviour, judgement and job attitudes, a model which suggests that emotional state can negatively affect work performance. Such a model could imply a reduction in retention and workplace citizenship in a climate where one's emotions are contrary to either those, which are accepted (a state of dissonance) or those that are permitted to be expressed. Evidence indicates that emotional dissonance increases intentions to leave an organisation (Abraham, 1999). Similarly, the intention to enact behaviours that can build corporate social capital (i.e. corporate cohesion, relationships and interconnection) reduce in line with the reduction of positive affect (Williams & Tze Shiaw, 1999). Hence, emotions ought be addressed as a management issue for workplace performance as much as for the ethical considerations of staff and their well-being.

Emotions as indicators of unfulfilled desires or wants, are also important indicators for managers of people. "Job satisfaction has been found to depend on the satisfaction of needs, in relation to what is wanted or valued" (Argyle, 1987; 147). One's emotional state can indicate one's job attitude (Fisher, Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2001 ) and provide a doorway for interacting and forming solutions. The key to opening the door that will release another's emotions and enable the intelligent management of them is firstly the understanding of what the other is truly feeling and knowing how to enter into, or communicate with, that closed room which holds the

hidden (though perhaps outwardly rampaging exhibition of) emotions. We introduce the Language, Emotion and Thought (LET) model as a tool for assisting managers to using the right key for opening the emotions door.

## **Overview of the Language, Emotion and Thought (LET) Model**

The LET model was developed by reviewing the Language-Thought relationship, the Emotion-Thought relationship, and the Language-Emotion relationship in order to ascertain how they relate to one another. From this review, we conclude that there is a relationship/connection between language, thought and emotion; that this relationship is dynamic; that the elements interact with, foster and create one another; and that each can and does impede or facilitate the other. The concept of the LET connection also implies that each element impacts on, develops, adduces, affirms, sustains and creates the other. Figure 1 depicts the LET relationship/bond.

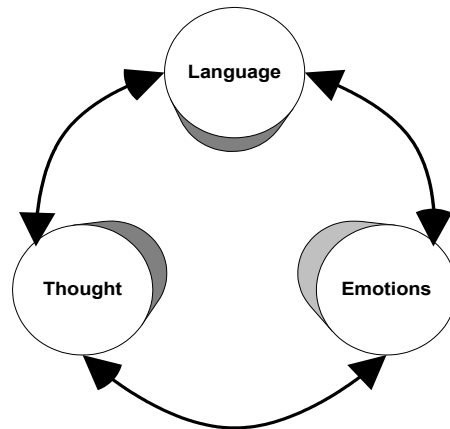
## **LET Explained**

### **Language and Thought**

For the purposes of this paper and to provide a starting point, thought will be the process of human mental activity related to ideas, understandings, concepts and cognition all of which, perhaps, can be used interchangeably. Language will be used to indicate words that express either thought or linkages to thought (Carroll, 1967).

In terms of the debate about the Language and Thought relationship (LT), there have been a raft of theses examining the connection between LT. Some of these have attempted to separate thought and language and some have argued that language is coded or expressed thought or that it represents thought (Kucaj II, 1999). Whilst others postulate that human cognition, at least at higher levels involving multiple concepts, requires language (Wagman, 1998).

**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Language-Emotion-Thought connection.**



There is a belief that thought can take place without language (Diamond, 1989) and that the difference between adult and animal cognition is the presence of language within the adult (with respect to language development, learning and cognition, an adult might be conceived to be a child, albeit a child with a broader experience than an infant) (Kucaj II, 1999; 153).

With regards to the language-thought connection Vygotsky postulates an inextricable connection between thought and word, thought and language, meaning and word and meaning and language (Vygotsky, 1971). Whilst thought and language may well be linked, language might also govern thought determining how the world is perceived and/or perception governed (Gopnik & Meltzoff, 1997). In fact, there may also be an inextricable link between thought, language and action. “Insofar as language is impossible without thought, and language and thought are impossible without the world to which they refer, the human world is more than mere vocabulary, it is word-and-action” (Friere, 1985; 50).

We can therefore suggest that language is both expressive of thought, reflective of thought and representative of thought but not essential to thought albeit

thought may be facilitated by language. In this regard, language may moderate, control or govern thought or, at least, the outward expression of thought. Language might also govern, moderate or control experience or the experience that can be perceived i.e. language can govern the perception and interpretation of the world and/or a reality that can be perceived and in that way it governs an individual's reality or what is knowable or what can be interpreted about an event (De Revera, 1977).

Language also provides a social or socializing function in that it enables an expression of an individual's reality and the sharing of that reality through mutual expression and, in this regard, language is a tool for either social connection/cohesion (Dunlop, 1984) or social disintegration. In fact, both thought and language represent experience and provide a tool for establishing, building and maintaining social relationships (Olson, 1980), because relationships and interactions are an experience which can be externalised, and shared with others, via language.

### **Emotion and Thought**

Using a social constructionism approach to emotions, we consider emotions to be defined by social and cultural settings rather than solely biological reasons (Oatley, 1993). Further, we take the view that emotions have a specific cause (Forgas, 1995; Frijda, 1993; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). For these reasons, we adopt Frijda and Mesquita's (1994, p. 51) definition of emotion:

Emotions are complex, structured phenomena... They are affective responses to what happens in the environment and cognitive representations of the event's meaning for the individual.

At a fundamental level, emotion and thought (ET) are as inextricably connected as language and thought. The stimuli for both occur simultaneously (Staats, 1968). In fact, the interaction with ET governs how human beings live and, as previously indicated, determine the ability to maintain health and well-being by being

the mechanism for coping with emotion (Buck, 1984), hence the mechanism for coping with the reality that is perceived, or can be perceived.

Emotions can also enable coping and development, which is achieved via a thinking/thoughtful process. There is some evidence that intelligence, whether this be emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996) or another type of intelligence, enables development, understanding of self, life and others (Blanchard-Fields, 1996).

At one end of a continuum, emotions and their volume or intensity can enable or disable thought, thinking and cognition (Stein & Devine, 1991). At the other end of the scale, “Feeling involves a natural process of emergence and development ... Given that people cannot control these affective experiences, it is best that they learn from them” (Greenberg, 1996; 315), and so emotions facilitate thinking, thought and cognition. We are human and being human, we have both emotions and thought. “To integrate the two is to help man realize what he might be” (Brown, 1976; 108)

There is also evidence to suggest that memory, and therefore possibly knowing/cognition, is more strongly related to emotions than to fact (Larsen & Bernstein, 2000).

Hence, thought and emotions interact and interrelate to an extent that emotions can govern what is thought, or can be thought, and therefore emotions interact with, or are linked to, thought. “Emotions in part result from beliefs ... emotions consist of beliefs and engender beliefs...” (Frijda, 1996; 21).

### **Language and Emotion**

That there is a connection between language and emotion is self-evident when we look at the number of books, theses and words we use to try and explain emotion, feelings and the full affective domain. “Possibly, all the emotions can be, better or

worse, expressed and described in words ...” (Wierzbicka, 1992; 124) and through words we try to express, describe and label emotions, our own and others.

In fact, because conscious thought involves sentences (Carruthers, 1997) language is essential in order for human being to consciously reflect on feelings (and thought and perceptions). This also means that the language linked to ideas will also be connected to an associated emotional state and/or will frame that emotional state and whether that emotional state can be understood (i.e. thought about) or, in fact, exist for that individual.

Thus, it can also be said that emotion and language are linked. This goes beyond the communicative function of language in terms of its role in expressing emotion (Barrett, 1999).

With regards to interactions between people, that language-emotion connection is important because it reveals an interrelationship that governs how we are understood, the nature of our relationships and the internal relationship we have with ourselves and, eventually, what we believe. “In most arenas of daily communication, speakers convey not only information about some state or event but their feelings about that state or event as well ...” (Ochs, 1986; 256) and so, through language and a language interaction, we provide both content (i.e. information regarding thought and ideas) and affective messages.

### **Implications of the LET Model**

For organisations, leaders and managers of people, there are numerous implications to the model. These are:

1. Management interaction/interpersonal skills need to be designed to address the LET model;
2. Intelligent emotions management may benefit through the LET model;

3. People management skills need to address the LET elements within people;
4. Emotionally intelligent leadership would, perhaps, facilitate a dialogue and thought process that enable the labelling of events and others such that emotions and cognition generate action that builds respect, tolerance, appreciation of others, non-judgemental attitudes and social cohesion rather than diminish it;
5. The type of dialogue we choose to use when interacting can govern emotional states and hence well-being and hence workplace performance;
6. When training managers and leaders we will need to model an understanding of, and the skills related to, LET as this will send both an emotional and cognitive message regarding the skills/knowledge related to the training;
7. Emotional intelligence, and any measure of such, must include aspects of dialogue and cognition;
8. Self management, coping and well-being, will involve language (e.g. words to label emotions and associated thought);
9. Language will determine what people think and their emotional responses. Therefore, the labels used in an organization for work and for people will determine how managers perceive people (their staff) and react towards them, i.e., is work only business, profit and process or are people human beings (rather than human capital);
10. The way we label, via the words we use to describe, external events or circumstances can govern emotional states and thinking processes;
11. Language development, or at least language proficiency, in the predominant culture, or the culture of the workplace, can impact upon the ability to manage emotions; and

12. Emotional development, or a model for such, can provide a reference for understanding and/or facilitating, emotions management.

There exists some strategies that address the implications above, which will be discussed briefly here. Although the approaches outlined below are already in use, it is acknowledged that further research into their efficacy is required.

### **Intelligent Emotions Management – Interpersonal Skills**

Points one to four above can be grouped under the theme of skills of Intelligent Emotions Management (IEM-IS).

As discussed, language is a vehicle for expressing emotion and thought and is also the only externalisation of such. Hence, IEM-IS can be addressed through the interaction technique, and communication strategies/skills, we use. One example of an IEM-IS is the ERA communication/interaction strategy, ERA being :

- Empathic Listening (aka Emotive Tone Listening);
- Reflective Listening; and
- Action based communication.

A brief explanation of the ERA interaction approach follows.

#### **ERA Explained**

ERA, based on the LET framework, uses language, the externalisation of emotions and thought, as the key to opening the door to the inner realms of the emotions and thoughts of the individual that have given rise to an externalised behaviour. ERA is based on the premise that the speaker, (the emotionally charged person) who is being “managed”, can control his/her behaviour, destiny and

emotional state (see Emotional Hierarchy later) and process to a state of self-actualization (Frick, 1971) and self-determination.

The ERA approach views an interaction as being between two people where:

- a speaker experiencing the emotion gives voice and expression to the emotion and the need or want linked to that emotion and,
- a listener (in business terms, the manager or leader) who applies emotionally intelligent strategies and skills.

The first phase of ERA, Empathic Listening, is based around the ideas of Carl Rogers (Nye, 1966) and empathic listening. It is also based on the notion that using words or labelling and/or providing a label, using words to describe an emotional state, will make the emotional state conscious and therefore a state which an individual can examine and reflect upon. The model of Empathic Listening is both minimalist and maximised, i.e., it uses the minimum required to label and the maximum permissible in order to avoid the confusions that can be predicted using the LET model. Hence, a listener (or a manager/leader/mentor) listens and says, “You feel,” followed by a single word that identifies a feeling/emotional state. The delivery, as in all aspects of the ERA approach, will need to be almost “flat” in terms of body language and tone in order to avoid the judgmental messages that can be carried by non-verbal behaviour (Culley, 1992; 138).

The second phase, reflective listening, is one of reflective listening and follows successful (based on the speakers agreement) identification of the emotion/feeling state. Reflection is achieved by the listener restating the feeling label followed by “...because you want to...”, following which the listener either leaves a silence or describes a strategic direction for action. This links the goal emotional state

with the sought goal that is mobilized through the emotional state (Church, 1961; 199). This is particularly important in terms of job satisfaction and goal achievement (Argyle, 1987).

It is important to take particular note of the grammatical structure of the reflective phrase. The "...because you want to..." implies a goal to be attained which become the focus, and in fact the grammar requires a conscious attention to goals. This phraseology is preferable to more open interactions which, can lead to psychoanalysis, which is more the domain of psychotherapy not management.

The final stage of ERA is Action based communication, which focuses on goal attainment that will alleviate the emotional intensity or volume. This is enacted after the speaker agrees with, or states the goal that is identified through the reflective phase. During this final action focussed stage, the strategy is for the listener to firstly ask questions like, "How will that happen? How would that look for you? How would that work for you?" In the ensuing discussions of options, actions and outcomes can be tested with a value position in part because, "...a person's satisfaction depends in part on how well his values find expression in daily life style" (Yukl, 1981; 82-83), and also based on belief in values congruent action and well-being (Frankl, Crumbaugh, Gerz, & Maholick, 1967).

It should be noted that by providing a label or word for an emotional state, the listener is, in essence, performing a cross-culture function as well as a relationship building function. It is cross-cultural in the sense that the affective domain may have a culture and language of its own (a point worthy of further review and consideration, especially if society/communities are becoming disaffected or emotionally unintelligent)(McDougall, 1989). It is a relationship building function in that it

establishes a common understanding or agreed labels as reference points for shared communication.

Although ERA is in its infancy regarding use, to date over 1,000 people have undertaken training in the model. Although more research is required, anecdotal reports are indicating its efficacy as a management tool and skill for interpersonal communication that fosters independence and autonomy whilst providing a vehicle for the appropriate expression of emotional state.

### **Intelligent Emotions Management – Management Training**

Training managers and leaders will need to be congruent with the LET model, i.e., such training needs to ensure a clear dialogue regarding ideas and the emotions surrounding those ideas, especially if that training is based on people and leadership skills. Otherwise, training and skills development can be perceived as inconsistent, a powerful values statement which will carry an associated emotional position and, as suggested above, impact on thoughts (beliefs and ideas) about the training, its value and the hosting organisation.

Therefore, Intelligent Emotions Management-Management Training (IEM-MT) ought to accept, enable and facilitate the LET interaction process. A model currently being used for such a purpose has been described as Neuro-Empathic Training (NET).

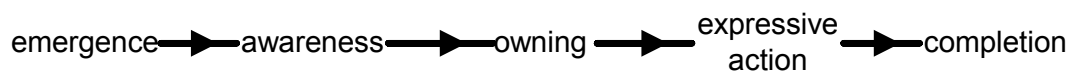
The NET approach, which incorporates ERA, will not be explained in full here as it is outside the gambit of this paper. However, its key elements involve addressing all components of the LET model, i.e., language (NET has set interaction strategies that use language), emotions (like ERA, NET helps label emotions) and thought (NET provides a variety of techniques for enabling reflection upon, and review of, ideas and LET linkages). In fact, in these respects, NET can be described as holistic

(Miller & Boud, 1996; Weil & McGill, 1989) where holistic is used to describe learning/education which equally embraces emotions and cognition.

NET also emphasises the value of self-knowledge and tools that enable self-reflection as a critical component of any self-development exercise, i.e., being able to deliberate on personal beliefs (Shoemaker, 1996). In NET, problem solving is facilitated, and understandings developed, by seeing emotions as reflective of environments, context and internal states (Lazarus, 1989). Emotions, therefore, become tools for insight and understanding of the self and others and also the interactions we have with the ideas and skills that are the focus of training. By way of summary, “... emotions are useful for revealing value; but what is really and in itself important is the value they reveal” (Stocker & Hegeman, 1996; 83), which can then be expressed in NET models, reviewed and accepted, rejected or modified as part of the training process.

Facilitating the LET process with the NET model allows emergence, assists awareness through labelling, and enables owning via reflection that leads to expressive action and completion. This emotional cycle (Greenberg, 1996; 316) is depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. The emotional cycle.**



## **LET and Emotional Intelligence Tests**

LET has clear implications for Emotional Intelligence (EI) tests. The points made earlier about ERA and NET are valid for EI tests and so are gathered together

under summary headings here. As such, EI tests would need to have the following attributes:

1. Assess linkages between, or seek outward manifestations of linkages between language, emotion and thought;
2. Discern indicators of an internally broad perspective, or ability/willingness to accept diversity with regards to situations outside one's direct experience;
3. Assess acceptance of, and/or focus on, emotions;
4. Assess an ability to interact with emotions, self and others; and
5. Hold the ability to enable emotional development of self and others.

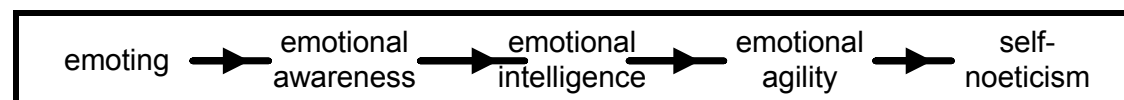
Currently, an EI test designed on the above premises, is being trialed. Known as the Logotheoric/Leadership Emotional Intelligence Generic Hallmark (LEIGH), this test is in its tenth incarnation and is currently being assessed as to validity and reliability. The test itself seeks to categorise types of EI rather than to rate a level of EI. The current categories range between being Effective (Process/Goals focussed) to Affective (Emotions/Feelings focussed) on one axis, and Specificity (a focus on specifics) to Variety (a focus on numerous and diverse things) on the other axis. Results of each subscale are then plotted on a graph which depicts both axes.

### **Emotional Development – Emotional Agility**

Finally, emotional development has an important place for being considered here. According to the LET model, emotional development will provide linkages between (leading to conscious linkages and self-reflection), plus fluidity of movement between, the LET elements. In fact, a model of Emotional Development (ED) congruent with LET, and the insights regarding ERA, NET and EI tests above, could be very useful.

As shown in Figure 2, emotional development has a course of its own. Reviewing the emotional cycle through the LET model and the preceding, brings forward an emotional development model, or rather an Affective Hierarchy, such as that depicted in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. The Affective Hierarchy.**



The Affective Hierarchy comprises five factors:

- Emoting - exhibiting emotions. Te equivalent to the emergence phase in the emotional cycle;
- Emotional Awareness – labelling with a word and thus entering the LET model. Equivalent to the awareness stage in the emotional cycle;
- Emotional Intelligence - the Thought-Emotion link akin to knowing and comprising the ability to describe, see in context, etc. The equivalent to, but an expansion of, the owning stage in the emotional cycle;
- Emotional Agility –the fluidity of being able to move through emotional states (a developmental step beyond EI because it involves intellectually and emotionally moving around the LET connection) until a state of completion or resolution is reached, resolution defined from an inner framework based on values (Frankl et al., 1967), goal achievement and challenging irrational thoughts/beliefs (Ellis, 1977; Ellis, 1996) to determine a new perspective or thought form (Lazarus, 1991) and removing values and beliefs that are triggering/causing distressing emotions. Emotional Agility is therefore similar

to the expressive stage in the emotional cycle but with the addition of self-governing and self-moderating mechanisms, and;

- Self-Noeticism – based on Frankl et al's (1967) concept of Noös akin to spirituality and a state of self-acceptance, i.e. acceptance of oneself as a human being, not for what one does, achieves or even as one being worthy of love (Ellids, 1992). Self-Noeticism is similar to the completion stage in the emotional cycle but involves a resolution and acceptance driven by values.

Clearly, the latter phases of the emotional development steps in the affective hierarchy require insight, reflection and understanding. Language will facilitate this and, perhaps, is the only vehicle for enabling conscious emotional development and adaptation, a process that reflects, and is enabled by, utilising insights gained from the LET model.

### **Conclusion**

As presented in the preceding, LET is important because it provides a model for entering into the world of emotions and a framework for developing tools, skills and interpersonal interaction and communication strategies for the intelligent, and ethical, management of emotions that can be achieved by lay people rather than counsellors and psychotherapists. Some of these tools, insights, and devices (e.g. tools for measuring EI and observing emotional development) are in use. Although all of these require further testing and validation, they are grounded in the LET model and are usable and accessible today, providing a starting point for further research tomorrow.

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