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# AI won't replace EI. Here is why

By Nais Mouret

Undertaking a “technology cleanse” is the latest trend. We are constantly being reminded to regulate the time spent on our phones. While we want to scroll less on social media, be less dependent on technology, and instead connect with others, we get bombarded by new technologies and new tools. Artificial Intelligence is likely the greatest bomb we have seen over the past few years. We receive overwhelming notifications on new AI tools every day. Yet, the more we see new technologies being created, the more we feel the urge to stay away from virtual simulations. Where is this contradiction coming from? Is there such a thing as emotional artificial intelligence? Is AI making us dependent on new technologies and removing us from our human emotions?

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and regulate our emotions. As such, the more self-awareness we build, the better we get at recognizing others’ emotions and adapting our responses accordingly. Empathy is one of the most critical EQ skills and, according to Forbes, the most important leadership skill.<sup>1</sup>

Artificial intelligence is the theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages.<sup>2</sup>

These dry definitions help us connect the dots with a recent concept called Emotional AI – or Affective Computing – which was created to define the ability of AI systems to detect and respond to human emotions. It involves using artificial intelligence to analyze and interpret human emotions through facial expressions, body language, and other cues.<sup>3</sup>

Nowadays, machines can recognize emotions based on facial recognition in which it will determine whether you are angry, sad, or happy, and adapt a response accordingly to validate such emotion. In short, a machine is now able to “empathize” with you. Yet, AI is limited in nature and cannot replace EI. EI is fundamental for creating effective teams and, more generally, for building interpersonal relationships.

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### **Why is AI so attractive?**

According to psychologist Daniel Goleman, AI is the antidote of slow, provides an expected outcome, and fulfills the goal of making our lives easier.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, you can draft a letter with ChatGPT in a few seconds. AI can take care of time-consuming tasks while you focus on being creative, build a project, etc. The original reason we wanted AI in our lives was to perform tasks that humans could not do. By teaching the machines how to act the exact way you would, you know exactly what the outcome will be and, as such, the risk-taking is close to zero as well as your investment return, which will never be wasted.

Emotional AI has been incorporated in many areas. One approach to incorporating emotional intelligence in investments is via Financial Emotional Intelligence (FEI). FEI involves adding emotional details to trade registries, thus allowing investors to reflect on how their emotions correlate with their decisions.<sup>5</sup> Another way is to use Emotional AI to detect consumer needs. For example, the company Entropik is transforming brand–consumer interactions by analyzing cognitive and emotional responses to gain deep insights into consumer behavior.<sup>6</sup>

We must ask ourselves what AI will be able to replace that ultimately removes us from our decision-making as human beings.

### **Emotional AI is not the answer, but rather an illusion**

In the EQ-i 2.0 Model of Emotional Intelligence, the

component of Interpersonal Skills regroups three main competencies – interpersonal relationships, empathy, and social responsibility.<sup>7</sup> These three competencies are critical to lead effectively and create a sense of belonging to something greater than the company or organization where you work. It is the feeling of being part of a project, a common goal, or the Why? That is often referred to, based on Simon Sinek's theory.<sup>8</sup>

## **Emotional empathy is our ability to know and understand how the other person feels and emotionally relate to the state of the person.**

Empathy is the most important skill in leadership and will most likely be affected by AI. There are three types of empathy – cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and what we call caring.<sup>9</sup> Cognitive empathy allows us to recognize the other person's emotion and adapt our response, which is central to communicating effectively and building effective teams. Emotional empathy is our ability to know and understand how the other person feels and emotionally relate to the state of the person. When we watch a movie, when we listen to a friend, when we attend our children's graduation, we feel the same emotion that those events or people convey. Our emotional reaction is usually unforeseeable and directly connected to an external event over which we do not have control. Emotional empathy opens the door to connecting with others and building stronger relationships. Caring is the way to compassion – we not only sense what the other person thinks and feels but feel concern for their wellbeing. Caring is what allows us to show concern in both our professional and personal lives. It is what we expect from our friends, our family, or our boss.

The ability of AI systems to detect and respond to human emotions is limited. Emotional AI is excellent at cognitive empathy in that it recognizes emotions, replicates them, and adapts the emotional response accordingly. The machine thus becomes a highly effective communicator. However, Emotional AI cannot replicate the two other types of empathy that are critical to how we communicate with others and how we build teams. The machine mimics empathy but cannot feel and care, which will inherently create a risk in delegating EI to AI.

## **How COVID-19 limited our EI to build interpersonal skills**

Basic recognition of facial emotions is one of the fundamental ways in which humans understand one another. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our facial emotion recognition was altered by the widespread adoption of face masks. Research found that the recognition of emotional expression relied strongly on the information conveyed by the lower part of the face.<sup>10</sup> This part of the face being hidden, a link can be drawn with a feeling of loneliness, lack of oxytocin, and depression as a result of a reduced ability to recognize emotions and connect with others. Indeed, according to the World Health Organization, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a 25 percent increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide.<sup>11</sup>

Over time, the necessity of building authentic interpersonal relationships has become more challenging to fulfill. When AI stops being a tool to make our lives easier but rather a way to replace human beings, there is an increasing risk of reducing our ability to recognize emotions with others. Taking away a part of our natural emotional intelligence is removing the inherent need to connect with others and build sustainable and trustworthy relationships.

## **The forgotten benefits of slow productivity**

Over the last 50 years, our ability to wait has been drastically reduced. According to Cal Newport, author of *Slow Productivity*, "The benefits of technology have created the ability to stack more into our day and onto our schedules than we have

the capacity to handle while maintaining a level of quality which makes the things worth doing".<sup>12</sup>

Thanks to technology, including AI, we can order Indian food within minutes from our smartphone, we can call a taxi for our ride to the airport direct from an app, we can order a brand-new bed to have it delivered at home the day after. At work, we pack our schedules with meetings, squeeze in a yoga class, get our coffee on the way and eat lunch at our desk. Our work culture praises busyness and multi-tasking. In other words, if you are not busy, then you should pretend to be busy. Therefore, slow is synonym to laziness and lack of productivity. That is where the danger of burnout lies, creating a line of thinking that busyness will give meaning to our path and make us more productive down the line.

In search of a better alternative, Cal Newport elaborated a strategy based on three principles – (1) do fewer things, (2) work at a natural pace, and (3) obsess over quality.<sup>13</sup> These three qualities seem to be in contradiction with AI. While we try to prevent ourselves from burning out, technology pushes us to our limits, ultimately making us compete with machines. It is a race we will never win when it comes to performing tasks. AI will be faster. However, AI is immensely limited and should be

used as a complementary tool to make our lives easier. The second it takes over our inherent capacity of emotional intelligence, not only is our decision-making taken away, but we create a dependency to a machine, which cannot replicate our emotional intelligence in its entirety.

### Why organizations should invest more in EI and shift their focus on “intelligence”

The most important skill in leadership is empathy and AI cannot replicate the three types of empathy. While organizations can focus on investing more in technology, they are strongly invited to invest more in their people, starting with leaders. Most leaders are not trained and thus we have more highly qualified managers than well-trained leaders. Consequently, employees leave bosses, not companies. Leadership is a set of skills that one learns with proper training and support from their organization. It is not learned in books or on an endless to-do list. When you think about company growth, think about how your business model makes your people make the right decisions, which ultimately makes your business thrive. That is the kind of intelligence companies should be focusing on.



Naïs Mouret brings over seven years of work experience in both the public and private sectors. She is a certified emotional intelligence practitioner and leadership consultant. She advises leaders and managers on implementing emotional intelligence tools and leadership practices. Born and raised in the south of France, Naïs obtained a BA in Political Science and History from La Sorbonne Paris 1 and her JD/BCL from the McGill Faculty of Law. She started her career in human rights based at the United Nations in Geneva and implemented over 30 projects worldwide. Fascinated by compliance matters in business, she pursued her legal career as in-house counsel. She worked for companies in Switzerland, Canada, the US, and France. She held roles such as head of legal affairs at a California-based company and more recently as senior legal counsel at L'Oréal in Paris. Naïs is also a certified yoga instructor and is passionate about alternative methods to improve wellbeing at work and foster productivity in the legal environment. She can be reached at [naismouret.com](http://naismouret.com).

1 Daniel Goleman, *Optimal*, p.84.

2 *Oxford Dictionary*.

3 [www.princetonreview.com/ai-education/emotional-intelligence-ai](http://www.princetonreview.com/ai-education/emotional-intelligence-ai)

4 Podcast: AI and the Future of Humanity, Daniel Goleman, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7tkBTXts7GLCBJUZDIot3i?si=2c29d56096cf41bc>

5 [www.forbes.com/sites/josipamajic/2024/01/30/ai-empathy-emotional-ai-is-redefining-interactions-in-the-digital-age/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/josipamajic/2024/01/30/ai-empathy-emotional-ai-is-redefining-interactions-in-the-digital-age/)

6 *Ibid* Forbes.

7 Wheel of EI ([naismouret.com](http://naismouret.com))

8 Simon Sinek, *Start with Why*.

9 Daniel Goleman, *Optimal*, p.77.

10 [www.researchgate.net/publication/357062867\\_Face\\_masks\\_impair\\_basic\\_emotion\\_recognition\\_Group\\_effects\\_and\\_individual\\_variability/link/6213afd84be28e145ca7aa93/download](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/357062867_Face_masks_impair_basic_emotion_recognition_Group_effects_and_individual_variability/link/6213afd84be28e145ca7aa93/download)

11 [www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide](http://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide)

12 Cal Newport, *Slow Productivity*.

13 *Ibid*.