

Goleman Emotional Intelligence for DSD Leaders

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Content

Goleman Emotional Intelligence for DSD Leaders

Resource type: Tier 1 Flagship — Methodology / Framework

Adapted from: Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998, 2013); Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee (2013); Richard Boyatzis

Library home: L08 Emotional Intelligence Library

Companion to: T04_04 Cultural Humility; T04_06 SAMHSA Trauma-Informed Practice; T04_14 RMHF

What this framework is

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others — and to use that capacity to guide thought and action effectively, especially in relationships and complex social situations. The concept was popularized and operationalized by psychologist and science journalist Daniel Goleman beginning with his 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* and developed further in the leadership-focused *Primal Leadership* (2013, with Boyatzis and McKee).

Goleman's framework organizes EI into four domains and twelve competencies, as described at DanielGolemanEI.com (<https://danielgolemanemotionalintelligence.com/ei-overview-the-four-domains-and-twelve-competencies/>):

Domain 1 — Self-Awareness

- Emotional Self-Awareness: Recognizing one's own emotions and their impact.

Domain 2 — Self-Management

- Emotional Self-Control: Managing disruptive emotions and impulses.
- Adaptability: Flexibility in response to changing circumstances.
- Achievement Orientation: Striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence.
- Positive Outlook: Seeing the positive in people and situations.

Domain 3 — Social Awareness

- Empathy: Sensing others' emotions and perspectives.
- Organizational Awareness: Reading the organization's social networks and currents.

Domain 4 — Relationship Management

- Influence: Inspiring and moving others.
- Coach and Mentor: Supporting others' development.
- Conflict Management: Navigating disagreements productively.
- Teamwork: Collaborative contribution to shared goals.
- Inspirational Leadership: Guiding with a compelling vision.

Goleman's research, summarized in the Disruptive Leadership Institute's overview (https://www.disruptiveleadership.institute/goleman_emotional_social_intelligence/), argues that EI — far more than IQ or technical skill — predicts professional effectiveness and organizational success, particularly at leadership levels.

Why DSD uses this framework

DSD staff at every level — from DSPs in direct support to supervisors, program managers, and senior leaders — operate in emotionally complex environments. They work with people facing disability, loss, family stress, institutional barriers, and sometimes historical trauma. They carry the emotional weight of that work. They manage conflict, provide difficult feedback, navigate bureaucratic frustration, and sustain relationships with people in acute need.

Without emotional intelligence, this work is unsustainable and inequitable. Without self-awareness, staff cannot recognize when their own emotional reactions are shaping service interactions in ways that harm the people they serve. Without empathy, they cannot genuinely center the person they are supporting. Without relationship management skills, they cannot maintain the trust relationships on which effective services depend.

The EI framework also directly supports DSD's equity goals: research consistently shows that leaders with higher EI create more psychologically safe, inclusive, and equitable workplaces. Staff who feel recognized and understood are more likely to stay, to grow, and to carry the organization's mission with fidelity.

The core concepts (plain language with citations)

Domain 1 — Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the foundation of EI. Goleman's research finds (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/four-domains-emotional-intelligence-daniel-goleman>) it is the most critical domain, because without accurate self-knowledge, the other domains are unreliable.

Self-awareness means knowing your emotional states — what you are feeling, when you are feeling it, and why. It means understanding how your emotions affect your behavior, your decisions, and other

people. It means recognizing your triggers — the situations that reliably produce disproportionate or misdirected emotional reactions.

For DSD leaders and staff, self-awareness includes:

- Knowing when you are burned out and acknowledging it, rather than pushing through.
- Recognizing when frustration with a bureaucratic system is bleeding into frustration with the person you are serving.
- Noticing when your discomfort with a family's choices is being expressed as professional concern about their decisions.
- Understanding the ways your own cultural background shapes your emotional responses to the people you work with.

Emotional self-awareness is the foundation for cultural humility (T04_04): you cannot examine your cultural assumptions without first being able to notice your emotional reactions to cultural difference.

Domain 2 — Self-Management

Self-management is the ability to regulate your emotional responses, rather than being controlled by them. This is not suppression — the research evidence on emotional suppression is clear that it is both unhealthy and counterproductive. Self-management is the capacity to experience an emotion, name it accurately, and choose how to respond to it rather than simply reacting from it.

Key self-management competencies in DSD work:

- Emotional Self-Control: Staying professional under pressure without denying the pressure exists. A supervisor receiving a complaint from a family member who is angry can hold their own emotional response steady without either becoming defensive or becoming mechanical.
- Adaptability: Changing course when circumstances change — a service plan that is not working, a new challenge a person presents, a team's shifting needs.
- Positive Outlook: Finding the genuine strengths and possibilities in difficult situations. Not toxic positivity — acknowledging what is hard — but not catastrophizing either.

The Ohio 4-H Emotional Intelligence background document (<https://ohio4h.org/sites/ohio4h/files/imce/Emotional%20Intelligence%20Background.pdf>) describes self-management as the domain that "allows us to take the 'raw' emotional material of self-awareness and use it constructively."

Domain 3 — Social Awareness

Social awareness is the outward-facing dimension: the capacity to sense what others are feeling and to read social situations accurately.

- Empathy: Not sympathy (feeling for), but empathy (sensing the emotional experience of another person from inside their perspective). This is the core relational skill of DSD work. Genuine empathy enables staff to understand what a service interaction feels like from the person's perspective, not just the staff member's.

- **Organizational Awareness:** Understanding the informal currents, relationship networks, and power dynamics of an organization. For DSD supervisors and leaders, this means knowing which teams are under stress before it becomes a crisis, recognizing the informal channels through which equity issues are being processed, and reading the organization's readiness for change.

Empathy in DSD is not just interpersonal; it has structural implications. Structural empathy — the capacity to understand how institutional structures feel from the inside of the communities they affect — is what turns policy intentions into policy outcomes.

Domain 4 — Relationship Management

Relationship management is the integration of the other three domains into action. As described by Ohio 4-H (<https://ohio4h.org/sites/ohio4h/files/imce/Emotional%20Intelligence%20Background.pdf>), "Relationship management can be used to influence those around us to make a good decision. We can sense other's reactions to the situation and fine-tune our response to move the interaction in a positive direction."

For DSD leaders, relationship management competencies include:

- **Coach and Mentor:** Supporting staff's emotional and professional development over time, not just managing performance events.
- **Conflict Management:** Navigating the inevitable conflicts — between family members' wishes and professional judgment, between staff's needs and organizational demands, between communities' expectations and policy constraints — without escalation or avoidance.
- **Inspirational Leadership:** Sustaining team commitment to DSD's mission through the daily experience of institutional friction, bureaucratic constraint, and the weight of people's unmet needs.

The leader-emotional-labor connection

Human services work is emotional labor — the management of feeling to fulfill the emotional requirements of a role. DSPs manage their emotional responses to support people through distress, loss, frustration, and resistance. Supervisors manage their own emotional responses while holding the emotional experiences of their teams. Leaders manage the emotional culture of entire organizations.

Emotional labor without emotional intelligence is unsustainable. It produces burnout, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and — when staff are operating from unmanaged emotional exhaustion — poor service quality and equity failures.

DSD's EI framework addresses this directly: developing EI is not a luxury for leaders; it is a structural condition for a sustainable, equitable workforce. Organizations with emotionally intelligent leaders have lower turnover, higher staff wellbeing, better service quality, and more equitable outcomes.

How EI shows up in DSD work

Self-Awareness in a service interaction: A DSP notices mid-conversation that they are feeling impatient with a person who communicates slowly. They pause, name the impatience internally, recognize that it

belongs to them and not to the person, and consciously reset — slowing their own pace, asking an open question, and listening.

Self-Management under organizational pressure: A supervisor receives word that a staff member has filed a complaint. Their first reaction is defensiveness. They notice the defensiveness, take a breath, and before responding to the complaint, ask themselves: "What does this person need me to understand? What might I be missing about their experience?"

Empathy in community partnership: A program manager preparing to present a service design change to a community advisory board pauses before the meeting to ask: "How might this change look from the families' perspective? What are they afraid of? What have they been promised before that didn't materialize?"

Conflict management in a team: An Equity Champion navigates a team disagreement about whether a service practice is culturally appropriate. Rather than taking a side, they help the team slow down, articulate what each position is protecting, and identify what additional information would help them decide.

How to apply this in your role

As a DSP or direct-support staff:

- Practice naming your emotional reactions internally before they become behavioral reactions externally.
- Use empathy as a deliberate professional tool: before entering an interaction, ask "What might this person be feeling right now? What would I want from someone in this situation?"
- Know your burnout signs. Name them to your supervisor before they become service-quality failures.

As a supervisor or manager:

- Create conditions for staff to develop EI, not just exercise it. Reflective supervision, psychological safety, and modeled self-disclosure are the conditions.
- Use the four-domain frame in performance conversations: "Where is this person's self-awareness? What would help their empathy? What relationship-management skill does this situation require?"
- Monitor your team's emotional culture, not just their outputs.

As a senior leader:

- Recognize that organizational culture is set by leader behavior, not leader policy. Your emotional self-management in difficult moments shapes the team's emotional culture.
- Build EI assessment into leadership development and promotion considerations — not as a checkbox, but as a genuine developmental investment.

Common misconceptions

"EI is just being nice." EI includes conflict management, adaptability, and organizational awareness — none of which are synonymous with niceness. High-EI leaders can deliver difficult feedback, enforce accountability, and navigate conflict — more effectively than low-EI leaders, not less.

"You either have it or you don't." EI is developable. Research supports that EI competencies respond to deliberate practice, coaching, and feedback.

"EI is about suppressing emotions." Self-management is not suppression. Research consistently shows that emotional suppression is counterproductive. EI is about recognizing and thoughtfully channeling emotions, not eliminating them.

"Men don't do EI." EI is not gender-typed. Research shows no consistent gender difference in overall EI scores; what varies is which specific competencies individuals develop. The framing of EI as "soft" or feminine is a cultural, not an empirical, claim.

Connection to other frameworks

- Cultural Humility (T04_04): Self-awareness and empathy are the emotional foundations of cultural humility practice. You cannot hold your own cultural assumptions accountable without noticing your emotional reactions to cultural difference.
- Trauma-Informed Practice (T04_06): Trauma-informed leadership requires the self-management to remain present with difficult disclosures, the empathy to understand trauma responses without pathologizing them, and the relationship management to rebuild trust after ruptures.
- Person-Centered Planning (T04_07): Genuine person-centeredness requires empathy — the ability to understand what a person actually wants, not what the staff member projects onto them.
- RMHF (T04_14): Relational-Cultural Theory's emphasis on growth-fostering relationships parallels Goleman's relationship management domain — both identify relationships as the site of human development and wellbeing.

Connection to DSD's six program goals

DSD Goal — EI Connection

Goal 1 — Eliminate Disparities — Empathy — structural and interpersonal — is what enables staff to recognize how services feel from the perspective of communities experiencing disparities.

Goal 2 — Community Engagement — Relationship management competencies (influence, coach/mentor, conflict management) are what makes community partnership possible at scale.

Goal 3 — Hiring and Retention — Organizational awareness and EI leadership are primary predictors of whether staff stay. Low-EI leadership is a retention risk.

Goal 4 — Learning and Development — EI is both a learning goal (developing EI competencies) and a condition for learning (psychological safety requires emotionally intelligent leadership).

Goal 5 — Contracts and Procurement — EI leadership in procurement means genuine listening to community partners, not extractive consultation.

Goal 6 — Communication and Accessibility — Empathy and social awareness are the EI foundations of accessible communication — understanding how your message lands, not just what you intend.

When to escalate / where to refer

- For EI-informed supervision tools: Consult the Equity and Inclusion Operations Consultant and the L08 Emotional Intelligence Library.
- For secondary traumatic stress or burnout concerns: Refer to your organization's EAP (Employee Assistance Program), HR, and your supervisor. Secondary traumatic stress is a recognized occupational risk in disability services.
- For team EI development: Contact the Equity and Inclusion Operations Consultant for available learning resources and coaching pathways.

Reflective questions for your practice

1. What are your most reliable emotional triggers in DSD work — the situations that consistently produce a disproportionate or misaligned emotional reaction?
2. When was the last time you made a decision in a service context that you later realized was shaped by your emotional state rather than the person's needs?
3. What does your team's emotional culture feel like right now? How much of that is shaped by your own emotional modeling?
4. When you experience empathy in a service interaction, what does it actually feel like in your body and your mind — and what do you do with it?
5. What is one EI competency you want to develop this year, and what would development look like in concrete practice?

Sources

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- Boyatzis, R. E., & McKee, A. (2005). Resonant leadership: Renewing yourself and connecting with others through mindfulness, hope, and compassion. Harvard Business School Press.

Always defer to the person in front of you. Frameworks describe patterns; people are individuals.

Use empathy as a deliberate professional tool: before entering an interaction, ask "What might this person be feeling right now? What would I want from someone in this situation?"

Create conditions for staff to develop EI, not just exercise it. Reflective supervision, psychological safety, and modeled self-disclosure are the conditions.

Use the four-domain frame in performance conversations: "Where is this person's self-awareness? What would help their empathy? What relationship-management skill does this situation require?"

Build EI assessment into leadership development and promotion considerations — not as a checkbox, but as a genuine developmental investment.

Ask: What are your most reliable emotional triggers in DSD work — the situations that consistently produce a disproportionate or misaligned emotional reaction?

Ask: When was the last time you made a decision in a service context that you later realized was shaped by your emotional state rather than the person's needs?

Ask: What does your team's emotional culture feel like right now? How much of that is shaped by your own emotional modeling?

For division leadership, use Goleman Emotional Intelligence for DSD Leaders to set expectations, coach the practice, address barriers, and review outcomes; set direction, allocate resources, name accountable owners, and review outcome patterns. Start by use empathy as a deliberate professional tool: before entering an interaction, ask "What might this person be feeling right now? What would I want from someone in this situation?"

For policy regulatory analysts, use Goleman Emotional Intelligence for DSD Leaders to verify current authority, preserve rights and exceptions, and route interpretation questions; trace each recommendation to current authority, preserve exceptions, and document the decision record. Start by create conditions for staff to develop EI, not just exercise it. Reflective supervision, psychological safety, and modeled self-disclosure are the conditions.

For facilitators learning leads, use Goleman Emotional Intelligence for DSD Leaders to set expectations, coach the practice, address barriers, and review outcomes; build the guidance into preparation, practice, debrief, access checks, and follow-up. Start by use the four-domain frame in performance conversations: "Where is this person's self-awareness? What would help their empathy? What relationship-management skill does this situation require?"

This resource is not clinical care, crisis response, or a substitute for a trained practitioner when the situation requires one.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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