

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Emotional Intelligence

Self-Awareness

Self-Regulation

Social Awareness

Social Skills

Across global work with senior leaders, coaches, facilitators and organisational professionals, one consistent pattern emerges: technical capability alone is not what differentiates effective leadership. What matters more is how individuals think, relate, regulate, and act within complexity.

Leadership is experienced by others, not declared by role.

This is where two powerful lenses become highly relevant: the Authority, Presence, Impact (API) model (Hawkins & Smith, 2003) and Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Goleman, 1998). When combined, they provide a robust, evidence-informed way of understanding leadership as both internal and relational practice.

Emotional Intelligence in Depth

Emotional intelligence is widely understood as a set of interrelated capabilities that enable individuals to recognise, understand, manage, and influence emotions in themselves and others (Goleman, 1998; Boyatzis, 2018). It is not fixed; it develops over time through reflection, feedback, and experience.

Self-awareness

Self-awareness is the foundation of emotional intelligence. It involves recognising emotional states, understanding behavioural patterns, and appreciating the impact one has on others.

Research suggests a significant gap between perceived and actual self-awareness. Eurich (2018) found that while many individuals believe they are self-aware, only a small proportion demonstrate accurate self-understanding.

In leadership practice, low self-awareness often shows up as:

- Overconfidence or defensiveness
- Misreading of others' reactions
- Limited openness to feedback

High self-awareness enables:

- Better decision-making
- Stronger relationships
- Greater adaptability

Self-regulation

Self-regulation builds directly on self-awareness. It refers to the ability to manage emotional responses, particularly in high-pressure or uncertain situations.

Leaders who demonstrate strong self-regulation:

- Pause before reacting
- Maintain composure under pressure
- Avoid emotional contagion that negatively impacts others

Without self-regulation, emotional reactivity can create ripple effects across teams and systems.

Social awareness

Social awareness extends beyond the self to include understanding others' emotional states and perspectives. Empathy is central here.

Zaki (2019) conceptualises empathy as involving:

- Recognising others' emotions
- Resonating with those emotions
- Acting with the intention to support or improve others' experience

This is critical in leadership, facilitation, and coaching contexts where trust and psychological safety influence learning and performance (Edmondson, 1999).

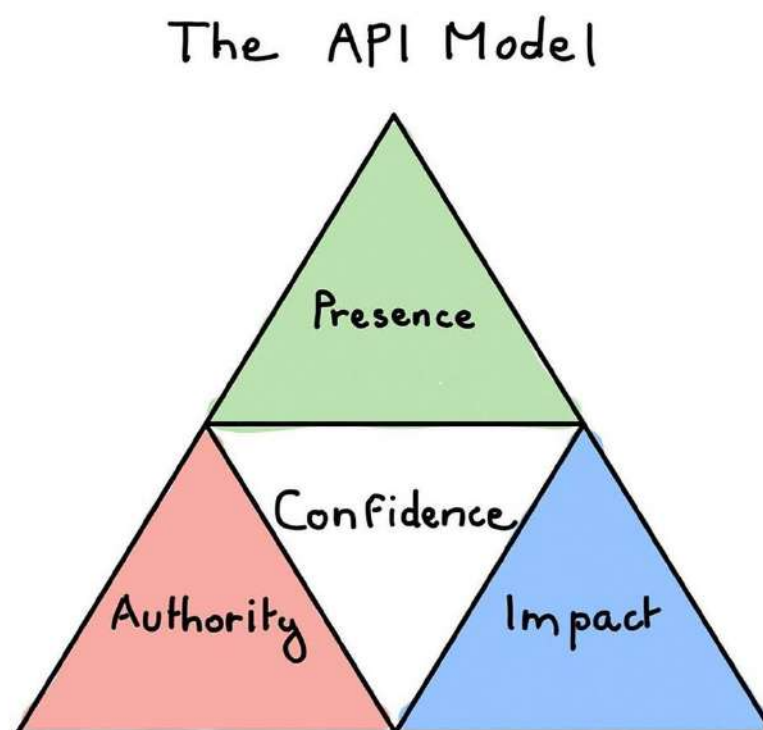
Relational capability

Relational capability (often referred to as social skills) involves the ability to influence, communicate, manage conflict, and collaborate effectively.

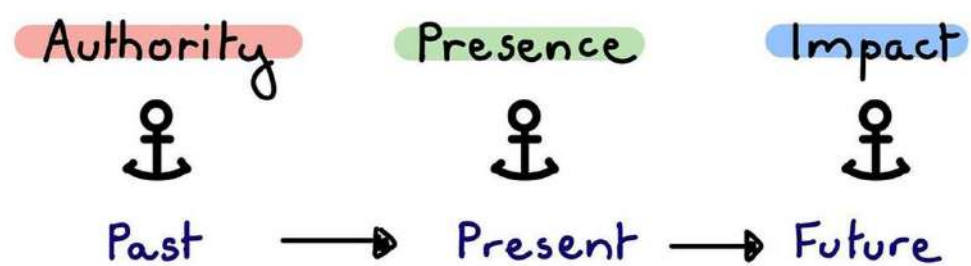
This is where emotional intelligence becomes visible in behaviour:

- Building trust
- Navigating difficult conversations
- Aligning people toward shared goals

Authority, Presence, Impact (API)



it helps building trust and assist our clients in their change process



Positioned within this broader understanding of emotional intelligence, the API model (Hawkins & Smith, 2003) provides a structured way to explore leadership identity and effectiveness.

Rather than focusing solely on actions, it invites inquiry into:

- Who am I being as I lead?
- What do others experience from me?
- What kind of impact am I creating?

Authority

Authority relates to a leader's internal sense of legitimacy. It is not simply derived from position or status, but from self-trust and clarity of judgement.

Leaders with developed authority:

- Act without excessive reliance on approval
- Hold decisions under uncertainty
- Take responsibility without over-identifying with outcomes

Where authority is underdeveloped, it may appear as:

- Avoidance of difficult decisions
- Over-consultation or dependency on reassurance
- Defensive or controlling behaviours

Authority is developmental and evolves through reflection and experience (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Presence

Presence represents how leadership is experienced in the moment. It includes attention, emotional regulation, embodiment, and relational awareness.

It is expressed through:

- Listening quality
- Tone and pace of voice
- Body language and posture
- Ability to remain grounded under pressure

Presence allows leaders to adapt to context, shift between directive and facilitative styles, and create space for others to think and contribute.

Impact

Impact is the outcome of authority and presence in action. It includes both tangible results and relational effects.

Leaders create impact through:

- Clarity of direction
- Trust within teams
- Cultural patterns reinforced over time (Schein, 2010)

When there is misalignment between intention and impact, it often reflects gaps in authority or presence.

Integration of API and Emotional Intelligence

These frameworks are deeply interconnected.

- Self-awareness strengthens authority.
- Self-regulation enhances presence.
- Social awareness supports relational sensitivity.
- Relational capability amplifies impact.

Together, they create a more complete picture of leadership as lived experience rather than theoretical capability.

In complex organisational environments, professionals are required to:

- Reflect while acting (Schön, 1983)
- Navigate multiple stakeholders
- Manage uncertainty and competing demands

The integration of API and emotional intelligence supports this by enabling leaders to remain grounded, relationally attuned, and outcome-focused.

Leadership effectiveness is not achieved through knowledge alone. It is developed through ongoing reflection, feedback, and intentional practice.

The combination of emotional intelligence and the API model offers a practical, evidence-based framework for developing leadership maturity.

It enables professionals to move beyond surface-level performance toward deeper coherence between identity, behaviour, and impact.

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