

Comparing Versatility to Emotional Intelligence

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become a trend in corporate America. Books by Daniel Goleman and others have become national best sellers, and have influenced boardrooms and training departments in companies across all industries and sizes. The emphasis that EI practitioners place on interpersonal skills has struck a chord for many people who feel this aspect of performance has not been adequately represented, or even recognized, in their organizations. Research displaying the importance of EI for success in life has helped to legitimize its place in corporate development programs.

Though EI became a phenomenon in the 1990s, the concepts that are the cornerstones of EI have existed for decades, often called “social intelligence” or simply “interpersonal skills.” The TRACOM Group was an early leader in the research and development of an EI model called “Versatility.”

Recent publications (Bar-On, 2002; Cherniss & Goleman, 2002; Goleman, 1998; Goleman, McKee, & Boyatzis, 2002) have illustrated that TRACOM’s model of Versatility, originally developed in the 1960s, precedes and parallels many of the concepts of emotional intelligence. For example, one central aspect of the application of TRACOM’s SOCIAL STYLE Model™ is to “Know Yourself, Control Yourself, Know Others, and Do Something For Others.” These correspond very closely to the

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four dimensions of emotional intelligence outlined by Goleman and his colleagues (see Figure 1).

TRACOM describes the steps for increasing social effectiveness, or Versatility, as:

1. **Know Yourself.** Have self-understanding. Be aware of your own behavior and how it can increase tension in others.
2. **Control Yourself.** Manage those behaviors that will interfere with a relationship. As we understand others and ourselves, we can control our actions that we know cause discomfort in others.
3. **Know Others.** By observing others’ behaviors we can learn about their tension levels, how they are responding to us, and how we can respond more appropriately to them. We use our feedback skills to understand the signals others are giving us.
4. **Do Something for Others.** When appropriate, adjust to others’ preferences. Do what you can to decrease their tension level thereby creating a productive environment.

Figure 1. EI-Versatility Correspondence

Emotional Intelligence	Versatility
Self Awareness	Know Yourself
Self Management	Control Yourself
Social Awareness	Know Others
Relationship Management	Do Something For Others

Principles of Versatility

TRACOM's Social Style Model identifies four Social Styles based on an individual's levels of assertiveness and responsiveness. The Model provides an understanding of the specific behavioral preferences that individuals with each Style typically demonstrate.

Similar to the principles of the emotional intelligence literature, one foundation of the Social Style Model taught in TRACOM courses for over three decades is that a person's particular SOCIAL STYLEsm counts less than the way he or she uses that Style when interacting with others. That is, though our Styles are relatively constant and fixed, we can still consciously decide how to behave with others, and whether we want to adjust our behaviors so our interactions will be productive and mutually beneficial.

A person's level of Versatility indicates the degree to which he or she is perceived by others as focusing on reducing his or her own tension, or on reducing the tension of others. Will a person's actions be self-serving and focus more on personal comfort and tension reduction, without clear concern for the impact his or her behavior has on others? Or, will the person's actions demonstrate some degree of concern for reducing the tension in others and maximizing effectiveness for a productive relationship?

If a person creates a positive impact upon others with his or her Style, others will tend to report favorably about that person's actions and work relations will be more rewarding and productive. Like other researchers in the area of emotional intelligence, TRACOM has found that Versatility is changeable and can be influenced through learning and practice. Versatility is the aspect of a person's behavior that is most flexible and therefore most responsive to training and develop-

ment, and it is also the most important for earning the approval and support of coworkers and others.

Versatility Expanded

TRACOM researchers recently expanded the Versatility Model based on a comprehensive review of the emotional intelligence literature, identifying several key concepts as useful expansions of the Versatility measure. These concepts were clearly defined in relation to the Versatility components and were incorporated into our Social Style measurement system.

When reviewing the emotional intelligence literature, we established certain criteria for selecting concepts that would correspond with and complement the Versatility dimensions. It was determined that each concept should:

- Have empirical support for its measurability
- Have theoretical and empirical support for its relationship with interpersonal interactions and job performance.
- Theoretically fit into the existing conceptualization of Versatility.

Emphasis was put on adopting only those concepts that are most important for interpersonal skill and success within the workplace. The emotional intelligence framework is concerned with multiple facets of people's lives. While participants in TRACOM programs often remark that the insights they have gained are relevant beyond the workplace, we wanted to maintain our emphasis on productive relations and functioning within the work environment. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of subdimensions that are measured under each of the four Versatility components. These subdimensions include both the pre-existing Versatility constructs and the newly adopted emotional intelligence constructs.

Figure 2 - Subdimensions of Versatility

Image	Presentation	Competence	Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dress and Grooming • Physical Workspace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of Formal Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscientiousness • Flexibility • Innovation • Perseverance • Optimism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Listening • Adaptive Communication • Empathy • Interpersonal Relations

Versatility is comprised of four elements. While Image and Presentation are most important early in a relationship, Feedback and Competence are most influential in the long term.

Tools for Improving Versatility

In the past, TRACOM's Social Style Profile (SSP) was the primary assessment tool for determining one's Social Style. To incorporate the expanded Versatility model, TRACOM created the Social Style Profile - Enhanced (SSP-E). Social Style program participants now receive an enhanced report that describes specific components of Versatility (i.e., Image, Presentation, Competence, and Feedback). This more detailed level of feedback is instrumental in helping participants to identify the specific behaviors that they should focus on in order to improve their overall Versatility.

In 2004, TRACOM developed a follow-up measurement and feedback tool - the Versatility Report & Improvement Guide - to provide people with a means for reviewing and practicing the Versatility information they learned during the Social Style workshop. The Versatility Report can be used within three years of a Social Style workshop, and like the SSP-E, it measures components of Versatility in depth and provides even more detailed feedback. The 40-page report also provides users with personal advice for improvement and recommended action steps for how to interact with individuals of each Style.

Summary

Recent research points to the importance of emotional intelligence to an individual's success. TRACOM's Versatility model, originally developed in the 1960s and recently updated, precedes and parallels many emotional intelligence concepts. An individual's Versatility, or the amount that they focus on reducing others' tension more than their own, can be influenced through learning and practice. TRACOM offers a variety of research-based tools and courses for improvement.

References

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