



## **BPM NEXT GEN**

TOWARD DIGITAL  
TRANSFORMATION

### **The BPMNextGen Podcast**

#### **Season 1: Episode 2**

#### **Transcript: The Science of Emotional Intelligence**

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** Hi, I'm Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland. Welcome to today's podcast brought to you by APQC and BPM Next Gen. Today we're going to talk with Bill Benjamin, partner at the Institute for Health and Human Potential and a keynote speaker at APQC Process and Knowledge Management Conference. We're going to talk about the science of emotional intelligence and how BPM teams can leverage it for success in their work. Thank you for joining us today, Bill. It's always a pleasure to chat with you.

**Bill Benjamin:** It's great to be here. Thanks for having me.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** So one of the things I want to kind of really start this conversation about is kind of the big why. Why is cultivating emotional intelligence or IQ a vital skill for BPM teams?

**Bill Benjamin:** Yeah, I love that question because it was the same question I had when I was first introduced to emotional intelligence. I have degrees in mathematics and computer science, so like many of your listeners, I'm very logical and very analytical and emotional intelligence seemed really soft and squishy. And the thing that really attracted me to it was the research and brain science behind it in terms of the research. What's really clear from the Harvard research, they did the seminal research study on emotional intelligence, and they looked at medical business and law school graduates

and followed them in a 40 year longitudinal study, and they measured their success. So both in terms of career and wealth accumulation, but also personal and psychological factors, divorce rates, alcoholism, and they determined that IQ and technical skills. So process management type skills are actually very poor predictors of success. Now, that might sound controversial to someone whose job is BPM, but what they determine is that their threshold competencies. In other words, it's not that they're not important. It's that you need a certain amount of them in order to be effective. In any job. I've delivered emotional intelligence training to surgeons. You want your surgeon? High IQ and technical skills, right? Right. Of course you do. But even in the case of surgeons, once they get over the threshold of IQ technical skills, getting more does not significantly differentiate performance. An example there is I shared a research study with the surgeons that showed that surgeons who are high in impulse control and empathy to emotional intelligence competencies, they get sued less often. Makes sense, right?

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** Right.

**Bill Benjamin:** The tension after that. So it's true in the case of business process management. Of course, you have to understand all the goes behind the systems and the processes. But there's people involved. And so the key differentiator of people who are successful in those kinds of roles is emotional intelligence in the Harvard study. Emotional intelligence accounted for twice as much as IQ and technical skills combined in terms of determining who would be successful.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** Another thing that makes a lot of sense that the stuff we see with BPM teams is, is that the hardest part of BPM work is the people part because you are directly affecting how people execute the work, their sense of well-being, their place in the company. And those technical skills are trainable, right? They're very much easier to absorb. But understanding things like emotional intelligence, change, management skills and all those kind of things that fit together that really help you then empathize and lead people along so that something that's happening with them rather than to them.

**Bill Benjamin:** Yeah, and that's what I struggled with early on. So I was a high performing individual contributor and of course they promoted me. And the thing I struggled with was the people side of it. I actually wasn't a very good leader. People didn't really like working for me. So that was the part that I had to recognize that what I

needed to learn and work on was my emotional intelligence. And we're not saying, Don't keep up on your technical skills. Of course you need to so attend the technical skill sessions at the APQC conference, and you also need to work on your emotional intelligence.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** So given all of this, how does EIQ help team leaders drive, change and improve collaboration?

**Bill Benjamin:** Yeah, and for that, that's where I want to talk a bit about some of the brain science, because it's critical to understanding the science of human behavior in order to understand why people resist change or why they have trouble collaborating. And it comes back to how our brain is designed. There's two parts to our brain. There's the emotional part of the brain centered in our limbic system and a small part of the brain called the amygdala. And that's the part of our brain that allowed us to learn for the first time. It's also the part of our brain that manages our fight or flight responses. So it's going to react to any kind of perceived threat. Then there's your neocortex or your cognitive brain. That's where you do all your best thinking, strategizing, prioritizing, seeing processes and systems. Listening. Seeing options. In the design of the brain when we perceive a threat, and if we're in the jungle and a tiger jumps out at you, and I know your folks don't spend a lot of time in the jungle, but it's a good metaphor. When when a tiger jumps out at us, the emotional system jumps into the driver's seat, and only one of these two systems can be in the driver's seat. Driving our reactions, driving our behavior, driving our thinking, driving our attitude. And so when we perceive that threat, the emotional system jumps into the driver's seat. It causes the release of chemicals into our body. Blood moves to the major muscle groups. Your heart rate increases, you're ready for fight or flight. In addition, the amygdala releases chemicals into the brain that reduces our thinking capacity, reduces our ability to think complex thoughts. So you might have heard yourself say, Oh, I was so angry, I couldn't think straight. Or you might have had that difficult conversation with a partner or spouse and 20 minutes later thought of all the good comebacks. Right. Because in that moment, your emotional system was in the driver's seat and it doesn't want you thinking complex thoughts. So it also we become more self referential. We become more defensive. We move to some typical default behaviors, which is either to avoid difficult situations, what we call last 8% situations, or we make a mess of them. We move to our fight responses. So in those

moments is when our emotions can take over and lead us to behaviors, interpersonal reactions that are less skillful.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** Right.

**Bill Benjamin:** We call that an amygdala hijack because the amygdala or emotional brain can literally hijack your thinking mind and move toward unskillful default behaviors to avoid or make a mess, fight or flight.

**Bill Benjamin:** So how does that reply to change? Well, any time there's uncertainty, the amygdala doesn't like it or any time. The amygdala also amplifies the negative. So in other words, if you're in the jungle and you know there's a tiger and you hear wind rustling in the bushes, you're going to naturally assume the wind is a tiger. Right now, there's two tigers. There's the real one and there's the one we're imagining. So when people experience change, it creates uncertainty that triggers the amygdala. They also amplify the negative, Oh, this isn't going to work. We've tried that before. I'm going to lose the opportunity to work on this project, or I'm going to have a new boss who isn't going to like me. Right. They amplify the negative. One of our training programs is actually called All Change Is Personal because so often, again, we get the processes and the systems and the communication, everything right. But we forget the impact that change has on people. Understanding how the human brain works, by the way, not just for others, but starting with ourselves. That's one of the fundamental tenets of emotional intelligence, is self-awareness and emotional management. So we have to manage ourselves first, put our oxygen mask on first to how we're handling and dealing with change, and then understanding and recognizing the impact the change has on others.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** So it sounds like there's kind of like a lot of different layers here going, which is the first that any time you're experiencing changes personal and it is going to and it is very, very emotional. One way or another, it's an emotional, whether it's a positive emotion or it is that reaction to the fight or flight syndrome. So you kind of start with just being stunned because your brain doesn't want your reaction. If you're in a situation that's dire, like you said, with the tiger. Your brain doesn't want to waste precious seconds using the thinking through all the options and the things that you could do to deal with this. So it kind of pares you down to basics, right?

**Bill Benjamin:** I mean, if you're in the jungle and the tiger's jumping out at you, your emotional brain doesn't have time to say, gee, how can I collaborate with the tiger, right? It's going to react right away. And so that's that's so in terms of collaboration, because you asked me about change and collaboration. That's where these last 8% moments that I just mentioned come in, because last 8% moments are the difficult situations that they that we face. There's the 92% of moments where everyone's getting along and we're meeting the goals and I'm not feeling overwhelmed. Then there's those last 8% situations. Whether that's a tough decision that's going to impact people, whether that's a change that is actually going to have a negative impact on some people or a tough conversation where we get 85, 90, 90% of the way there. The other person starts reacting emotionally. We now react emotionally because emotions are infectious. And again, we either avoid or make a mess of the conversation. The reason those moments are so important is because by definition, they're when the pressure is on, there's when there's tension and conflict, when that happens and the amygdala releases the chemicals, one of them is cortisol. And we we call it the cortisol effect. In addition to reducing our working memory, it also causes memories to sear in. Right. So we remember how people showed up in those last 8% moments. We don't remember how people showed up in the 92%. So it's those last 8% moments that define our reputation. Are we someone who is open to feedback, who listens well, who empathizes? Are we someone who collaborates well? Or are we someone who gets defensive or shuts down? And so those last 8% moments are critical, and it's critical to manage emotions so that we can develop those relationships built on trust and respect. And people are more willing to listen to us, to hear our point of view, because we've connected with them in a skillful way, not been emotional and reactive.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** Sounds like there's kind of two other things there. First off is is as far as bleeding change in particular, is that idea that it's emotional and organizations can only get so far with that check the box approach of change, which is like I've done training, we've sent out our communication. But it's really when you start engaging people on an emotional level that you do behavioral shifts and internalization, it sounds like.

**Bill Benjamin:** Yeah, absolutely. In fact, particularly a change like change that people see as a positive. That's easy, right? Things that people see is potentially negative. And remember, they amplify the negative. Got to connect with the emotions that will drive

their behaviors. So if you're not connecting to that, they're feeling unsafe. They're feeling like they weren't included in the decision. They're feeling like it's going to impact them negatively. If you don't address that, they're just going to continue to resist or be passive aggressive. And so, yeah, connecting to those emotions that drive the behaviors are critical. In fact, I'm doing a livecast on April 28 about the critical skill to coaching effectively and leading through change, and that is that ability to connect to emotions that drive people's behavior.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** But just to kind of clarify, the last part of my collaboration aspect of it is, as you said, emotions are and reactions are viral. So by understanding emotional and intelligence on ourselves, that seems like it may have a pacifying effect than for other people's kind of fight or flight responses when you're in that last 8%, would that be accurate?

**Bill Benjamin:** Oh, absolutely. In fact, Harvard did another really interesting study where they would have two people in a room and they would be wired up to measure their galvanic skin response time, which is how quickly they react emotionally. They would have a third person walk in the room in a dominant emotional state, either positive or negatively. And before the third person even said anything, the other two people would react either to the positive or negative emotion just based on the third person's body language in less than 10 seconds. So emotions are absolutely infectious. So if we show up with a little panic, a little anxiety, a little defensiveness or reactivity, that's going to trigger everyone else. If we show up with confidence and belief and optimism and trust and respect, that's going to positively infect everyone. And as you say, if we stay calm, that keeps everyone else around us calm so we can collaborate more effectively, deal with the challenging issues, have the tough conversations, make those last 8% decisions. And we're doing it from our cognitive brain, not from our emotional, reactive brain.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** That kind of leads into the third question, which is can emotional intelligence be developed and learned?

**Bill Benjamin:** Yeah, that's the great thing about it, because I know some people think, oh, you're just you're born with what you're born with. And there's no doubt that based on our kind of DNA and the environment we grew up in, we have developed certain

default behaviors, certain reactions. So, for example, when I was first learning this, if I was in a meeting sharing an idea, an innovation or a change, and somebody made a suggestion that felt like a criticism, I would immediately get defensive. That's a natural emotional reaction to feeling criticized. Well, am I stuck with that behavior for the rest of my life? No, because our default behaviors are neural pathways in our brain and they're like water running over rock. They get grooved in. But if we can recognize our emotional response, the self awareness apply an emotional management strategy. So in that moment I go to a new default behavior. Instead of getting defensive, I ask a probing question. Now I'm developing a new neuro pathway in my brain, and over time, if I practice that, that becomes the new default behavior. So we do know that the amygdala can learn new behaviors. It's not easy. It takes training, practice, coaching, but we can change and develop our emotional intelligence, our brain can change.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** When you outline that it can be done, what are some simple things people can do to start cultivating their own EIQ?

**Bill Benjamin:** Yeah, and again, the first thing is just the self awareness. So one quick thing I'd, I'd recommend is on our website, IHHP.com - Institute for Health and Human Potential. It's a mouthful. We have a short EQ quiz and it's not diagnostic at all. It's 12 questions. But those questions are EI based behaviors that will get people thinking about How am I doing? So an example of a question is I can air grievances skillfully. How do I do when I've got a truth to speak? Do I shut down and avoid it? Do I make a mess or do I handle it skillfully? Another question is I can listen without jumping to judgments and conclusions. How am I doing it that so that IQ test is just a simple way to start that process of self awareness. Now. Secondly, then you want to move into some emotional management strategies. And again, we have a whole training program and I'll be discussing some of these in the keynote that I'm delivering. But one simple example is we need to stop and disconnect from the trigger. So just a couple of quick things you can do is in that moment when you feel that trigger is take a drink of water. Water soothes our physiology and interacts with the chemicals that the amygdala has released. If you are getting a little triggered and you notice in your body that maybe your fingers curl, maybe not into a full fist, but they will start to curl. You can open your palms, right? If you're in a fight mode, you're going to be leaning forward, making yourself bigger, lean back.

**Bill Benjamin:** If you're in a flight mode and you're avoiding, you'll be doing the opposite. You'll be making yourself smaller and leaning back. Lean forward. Right. So there's very small things you can do to kind of create a pattern. Interrupt, because remember I said the emotional systems in the driver's seat in that moment, you've got to get the cognitive system back into the driver's seat. So those are really some small things that people can do. And then when it comes to connecting with others, it's really about doing what we call it, getting to the other side of the bridge. So we tend to start on our side of the bridge, from our perspective, from our experience, from our assumptions. Again, we become more self referential when we're a little triggered. So can we stop, manage our own emotions and connect to the other? What's going on for the other person? Why might they be reacting to this change? Why might they not be feeling safe or included or not liked or. And that's that's what empathy is based on. The empathy was something icky and squishy. It's not. It's just can you get out of your own frame of reference off your side of the bridge? Get to their side of the bridge and just think about what's going on for them. Right. So there's just a couple of quick strategies. Again, we have a lot more in our training program. We'll be presenting more in the in the keynote. But those are some quick things folks can do.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** And it almost like almost seems like also keeping an emotional journal or something would be incredibly useful, right? Identifying when you're having a negative emotion or something like that, mark it down and even you don't need to verbalize it. But talk about to yourself why you were having an emotion. So you can then reflect on it, identify what your behaviors are so you can start learning what your triggers are as well.

**Bill Benjamin:** Absolutely. You know, we work with Olympic athletes and I was talking to someone the other day and they were talking about a last 8% moment for them is when they're waiting to return a serve because that's going to come at you at 100 miles an hour. Right. So in that moment, if they get tight, if they get tense, if they get triggered, they can't return the serve as well. Whereas if they can recognize what's happening in their body, recognizing why they're having that tension and then apply the emotional management strategies, then they can be much more effective in that moment when the ball comes at them 100 miles an hour. So, yeah, absolutely. And and then with the athletes, we do after the fact look at and we also work with Olympic volleyball players during the game, wherever. Sometimes when you didn't go up for the

block or you missed a hit, what might have been happening emotionally for you or when you got down right when you were down in the game, what happened to your emotions? How did you react to that? So absolutely that idea of looking backwards and journaling to gain that self awareness is really powerful.

**Holly Lyke-Ho-Gland:** Excellent. Well, thank you again, Bill, for your insights. I always love chatting with you about this topic and thank all of you for listening to today's podcast. I hope you all learn something great. I always do when I talk to Bill. And I hope you have a lovely day. Thank you.

**Bill Benjamin:** And thank you, Holly. You ask great questions.