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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE PRECONDITIONS OF TENSE INTERACTIONS

Tense interpersonal interactions, marked by emotional intensity and communicative strain, present a unique challenge in both personal and professional contexts. This article investigates the role of emotional intelligence in shaping and managing such interactions through the lens of five key preconditions. The study explores how emotionally intelligent individuals interpret verbal and non-verbal cues, regulate emotional responses, and adapt their communicative behaviour in real time. Particular attention is given to how emotional intelligence supports empathy, emotional regulation, and sensitivity to social dynamics, thereby preventing escalation and fostering constructive dialogue. The article emphasises that emotionally attuned communication not only defuses tension but also deepens mutual understanding, transforming conflict-prone exchanges into opportunities for relational growth and collaboration.

Key words: interaction, emotional intelligence, precondition, communication, tension.

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ЕМОЦІЙНИЙ ІНТЕЛЕКТ І ПЕРЕДУМОВИ НАПРУЖЕНИХ ВЗАЄМОДІЙ

Напружені комунікативні взаємодії – це складні ситуації міжособистісного спілкування, які супроводжуються підвищеним емоційним напруженням, психологічним дискомфортом та ризиком виникнення конфлікту. У таких ситуаціях особливо важливо вміти розпізнавати емоції, контролювати власні реакції та будувати комунікацію на засадах поваги та емпатії. У статті досліджується, яку роль відіграє емоційний інтелект у забезпеченні ефективної комунікації в умовах напруженості, а також розглядає п'ять основних передумов, що визначають характер і перебіг таких взаємодій.

Також у статті аналізується, як учасники комунікації адаптують свої мовні стратегії відповідно до контексту та емоційного фону. Особлива увага приділяється таким аспектам емоційного інтелекту, як саморегуляція, соціальна обізнаність, когнітивна емпатія та здатність до емоційно насиченого, але конструктивного вираження думок. Емоційно-інтелектуальні люди здатні розпізнавати приховані емоційні сигнали, уникати мовленнєвих актів, що можуть бути сприйняті як загрозливі, а також перетворювати потенційно конфліктні ситуації на діалог.

Таким чином, у статті підкреслюється, що емоційний інтелект є ключовим чинником успішного управління напруженими комунікативними процесами. Він сприяє глибшому порозумінню, зміцненню міжособистісних зв'язків і формуванню здорового комунікативного клімату в соціальних, професійних та міжкультурних взаємодіях.

Крім того, дослідження демонструє, що емоційний інтелект не лише допомагає уникати ескалації конфлікту, а й створює умови для емоційного зростання особистості та розвитку комунікативної культури в цілому. Такий підхід може бути ефективно застосований у сфері освіти, управління, психотерапії та міжособистісного консультування, де напружені взаємодії є неминучими, але потенційно корисними для поглиблення взаєморозуміння та співпраці.

Ключові слова: взаємодія, емоційний інтелект, передумова, комунікація, напруження.

Introduction

Human communication is inherently complex, emotionally charged, and often unpredictable. Among its most challenging forms are tense interactions – exchanges marked by elevated emotional intensity, discomfort, psychological strain, or relational misalignment. These interactions may arise from disagreement, unmet expectations, power asymmetries, or emotionally sensitive topics. Tension in communication may manifest overtly through raised voices, interruptions, even confrontation, or it may emerge subtly via avoidance, sarcasm, as well as passive-aggressive behaviour. Regardless of its form, tension disrupts the natural rhythm of dialogue and increases the likelihood of misunderstanding and relational breakdown.

While not all tension leads to open conflict, it often acts as its precursor, creating conditions under which emotional friction may escalate. Importantly, not all conflict is inherently negative. When managed constructively, it can serve as a catalyst for growth, deepen mutual understanding, and strengthen interpersonal bonds. The key variable that often determines whether tense interactions spiral into destructive conflict or evolve into meaningful dialogue is emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence – as defined by scholars such as David Caruso, Daniel Goleman, John Mayer, and Peter Salovey – refers to the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and express emotions effectively in interpersonal contexts. Emotional intelligence enables communicators to navigate tense interactions with empathy, self-control, and relational sensitivity, thereby reducing reactivity and promoting constructive outcomes.

Analysis of recent research and publications

Although the term 'tense interaction' is not always explicitly used in scholarly literature, many researchers across disciplines have explored components that help construct a theoretical foundation for it. These partial contributions span pragmatics, social psychology, discourse analysis, and emotional intelligence research.

Erving Goffman [4], for example, did not use the term 'tense interaction', but his work on face-threatening acts, impression management, and the framing of social encounters provides a powerful conceptual basis for

understanding the dynamics of emotional strain and social vulnerability in communication.

H. Paul Grice [6], in formulating the Cooperative Principle, focused on how meaning is negotiated through implicature and shared assumptions. Though he did not directly address tension, violations of his conversational maxims often generate discomfort, ambiguity, and misalignment – all hallmarks of tense interactions.

Deborah Tannen [9] has written extensively on miscommunication, gendered language, and conversational style, particularly in close relationships. While she does not systematize tension as a theoretical construct, her analyses illuminate how differences in communicative expectations can produce emotional strain or disconnection.

Similarly, Robert Blakar [2] and Ragnar Rommetveit [8] contributed critical insight into the psychological impact of language and the construction of meaning in dialogue. While their focus lies more in power dynamics and cognitive interpretation, the emotional weight and asymmetries they describe are integral to understanding communicative tension.

In the field of emotional intelligence, scholars like Daniel Goleman [5], John Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso [7] do not frame their work around 'tense interactions' specifically. However, the competencies they identify – such as emotional regulation, empathy, and social awareness – are essential tools for managing such situations effectively.

Together, these scholars offer a fragmented but complementary foundation for theorizing tense interactions as a communicative phenomenon shaped by emotional, cognitive, and social variables. Thus, **the aim of the article** is to explore how emotional intelligence influences and facilitates communication in tense interpersonal interactions by examining various preconditions that shape such exchanges.

Presentation of the main material

Understanding how emotional intelligence operates in tense interactions requires attention to the various preconditions that shape communication under strain. These preconditions can be grouped into several interrelated dimensions: situational, cognitive, linguistic, social and socio-psychological, and aesthetic. Each dimension reflects a distinct but overlapping aspect of communicative experience – ranging from the physical and relational context of an exchange, to the psychological goals and emotional needs of the participants, to the stylistic or indirect forms of expression that carry implicit emotional content.

Situational Preconditions. It should be noted that situational preconditions refer to the contextual factors that shape how communication

unfolds in real time. These include the physical setting, social roles of participants, time constraints, cultural expectations, and the immediate emotional atmosphere of the interaction. In other words, every communicative act is embedded in a situation that influences both what is said and how it is interpreted.

Natural communication rarely achieves its goals through a single utterance. Rather, communication is a dynamic and goal-directed process, composed of multiple speech acts that unfold over time. These acts are not random; they are part of a strategic progression. Speakers continuously assess how the interaction is going and adapt their communicative choices accordingly – shifting tone, selecting new vocabulary, or changing tactics depending on how the other person responds.

In tense interactions, situational preconditions become especially significant because participants are not only managing linguistic meaning but also navigating emotional stakes. For example, a speaker may avoid direct disagreement (a tactical move) in order to preserve a cooperative relationship (the strategic goal), particularly if the situation involves unequal power dynamics or emotional sensitivity. The communicative behaviour in such contexts cannot be fully understood without reference to the situation's emotional, social, and cultural parameters.

Herbert Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims [6] form the foundation of many Western pragmatics models. Grice emphasised that successful communication relies on mutual cooperation and contextual sensitivity – factors that align with Daniel Goleman's notion of situational awareness and self-regulation [5], key components of emotional intelligence. These skills enable individuals to recognize the emotional climate of a situation and adapt their communication strategies accordingly. For instance, a speaker who perceives rising tension in a conversation can employ calming language or shift the topic, avoiding unnecessary conflict. Individuals with high emotional intelligence can detect when conversational norms are being followed or violated, and they adapt accordingly to maintain harmony or address tension. The failure to adhere to these principles often reflects low emotional intelligence, where individuals act impulsively or manipulatively without regard for others' emotional states.

Thus, the presence of emotional intelligence enhances a communicator's ability to assess these situational preconditions effectively. Individuals with high emotional intelligence can sense shifts in tone, detect discomfort or resistance in their conversational partners, and adjust their communicative behaviour accordingly – thereby increasing the likelihood of a constructive outcome, even in emotionally charged situations [5; 7].

Cognitive Preconditions. Cognitive preconditions involve the internal frameworks and mental models that participants bring into an interaction. These cognitive structures shape not only how individuals interpret incoming messages but also how they plan, formulate, and deliver their own communicative acts. From a psychological perspective, these preconditions are influenced by factors such as personal experience, memory, attributional style, and emotional schemas.

Ragnar Rommetveit [8] emphasized the role of intersubjectivity in communication, arguing that shared understanding is always partial, temporary, and co-constructed through dialogic engagement. For Rommetveit, meaning is not fixed but negotiated between interlocutors based on their respective interpretive frameworks. This dynamic interplay is especially salient in tense interactions, where participants may interpret emotionally charged language through divergent cognitive and emotional lenses.

According to Robert Blakar [2], language functions as a means of exercising social power. He contends that no utterance is ever truly neutral, since even informal or seemingly benign statements carry embedded assumptions and intentions that can subtly influence the listener's worldview. This insight aligns with sociocognitive theories of communication, which view language as a tool for both expressing and shaping internal models of reality.

Building on these foundations, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso [7] conceptualize emotional intelligence as the ability to accurately perceive, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others. They propose that emotional intelligence operates at both an intrapersonal and interpersonal level, supporting cognitive processes such as emotional reasoning, perspective-taking, and decision-making. When viewed together, these perspectives suggest that emotionally intelligent communicators are more adept at recognizing the influence of cognitive preconditions in dialogue and adjusting their strategies to foster mutual understanding, particularly in emotionally complex or tense interpersonal situations.

Linguistic Preconditions. Linguistic variation plays a central role in conflict communication. The choice of words, tone, and grammatical structures are rarely accidental; they reflect the speaker's intention and often carry emotional weight. In tense interactions, language becomes more than a vehicle for conveying information – it serves as a tool for emotional regulation, identity management, and power negotiation. Miscommunication often arises not from the content of speech alone, but from how it is framed and perceived emotionally.

Conflict is frequently fuelled by poorly chosen words or by speech acts that unintentionally convey disrespect or aggression. Even neutral statements can be interpreted as confrontational if they violate implicit norms of politeness or emotional tone. Psychological research suggests that individuals interpret such language through the lens of past experiences, emotional triggers, and relational expectations, making emotionally charged interactions highly vulnerable to misinterpretation.

This perspective finds strong parallels in Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory [3], which highlights the importance of mitigating face-threatening acts. Their work shows that speakers employ various linguistic strategies, such as hedging, indirectness, or honorifics, to preserve both their own and the interlocutor's social face. These strategies are particularly important in emotionally sensitive contexts, where maintaining dignity and minimizing perceived threat are crucial.

In its turn, Reuven Bar-On [1], who developed the Emotional Quotient Inventory, highlighted emotional expression and interpersonal communication as essential components of emotional intelligence. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are more adept at choosing language that reflects empathy and respect. They are sensitive not only to what they say but to how it might be heard. Moreover, they avoid emotionally charged or ambiguous language that could be misinterpreted or escalate tension. For example, instead of saying, "You're wrong," a high-emotional intelligence communicator might say, "I see it differently, and here's why." This nuanced use of language reflects both emotional awareness and social tact, reducing defensiveness and promoting dialogue.

Social and Socio-Psychological Preconditions. Indirect communication styles often stem from social conventions and psychological defence mechanisms, such as avoidance, projection, or displacement. These forms of communication are often used to maintain harmony, avoid direct confrontation, or protect one's sense of self. In the context of conflict or tense exchanges, individuals may resort to indirectness not out of deception, but as a strategy to safeguard personal boundaries or social roles.

Conflict situations frequently activate core psychological needs, such as the desire for validation, autonomy, control, belonging, or emotional safety. When these needs are threatened, individuals may express themselves in ways that appear ambiguous, passive-aggressive, or contradictory. Such behaviour is difficult to interpret without a high degree of emotional sensitivity, as the emotional message often lies beneath the surface of the literal words spoken.

This dynamic aligns with established theories of social-emotional development (e.g., Erikson, Bowlby etc.) and interpersonal communication,

particularly those that emphasize self-concept, relational positioning, and emotion regulation. In such frameworks, social interaction is not just a matter of exchanging ideas but of negotiating identity and emotional equilibrium within shifting relational contexts.

Daniel Goleman [5] emphasized empathy, impulse control, and social skills as foundational competencies for managing complex interpersonal relationships. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to decode the emotional subtext of indirect communication – such as discomfort, fear, or resistance – and to respond in a way that acknowledges and addresses the speaker's unspoken emotional needs.

In group dynamics, emotional intelligence becomes even more vital. It supports role awareness, status sensitivity, and cultural adaptability, allowing individuals to navigate hierarchies and interpersonal diversity without provoking defensiveness or disengagement. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are often able to act as emotional facilitators, helping others articulate hidden concerns, de-escalate misunderstandings, and re-establish trust in the communicative space.

Aesthetic Preconditions. Some communicators experience a form of aesthetic satisfaction or expressive fulfilment when articulating their thoughts through indirect, figurative, or stylistically rich language, especially during emotionally charged or high-stakes conversations. In such contexts, aesthetic strategies – such as metaphor, allegory, irony, or poetic rhythm – not only serve as tools of expression but also function as emotional shields that help speakers convey difficult messages without exposing their full emotional vulnerability.

These stylistic choices often point to deeper relational dynamics, where maintaining subtlety, grace, or social decorum is prioritized over direct confrontation. The aesthetic layer becomes a communicative buffer, allowing emotional content to be encoded in a socially acceptable and sometimes culturally valued form. This is particularly evident in cultures or interpersonal contexts where indirectness is associated with politeness, wisdom, or emotional restraint.

Mayer, Salovey & Caruso [7] describe the ability to express emotions in socially appropriate and creative ways as a high-level emotional intelligence skill. This expressive creativity involves not only linguistic competence but also an understanding of timing, context, and audience receptivity – hallmarks of emotional and social awareness.

Emotionally intelligent individuals often use humour, metaphor, or poetic language to soften direct criticism, diffuse potential conflict, or create shared emotional resonance. These strategies allow speakers to maintain relational harmony while still addressing sensitive issues. This kind of

emotionally attuned aesthetic expression fosters connection, preserves dignity, and reduces defensiveness – even in moments of disagreement or vulnerability.

Ultimately, the ability to construct messages that are both aesthetically pleasing and emotionally sensitive reflects a mature form of emotional intelligence – one that integrates cognitive empathy, self-awareness, and expressive sophistication into meaningful human interaction.

Conclusions

Tense interactions are a natural but challenging aspect of human communication, often driven by complex emotional, cognitive, and social dynamics. While not all tension results in conflict, it creates fertile ground for misunderstanding and relational strain. The article demonstrates that emotional intelligence – especially the capacity for self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and social sensitivity – serves as a vital mediator in navigating these interactions.

Each of the five preconditions examined – situational, cognitive, linguistic, social and socio-psychological, and aesthetic – offers a lens for understanding how tension arises and can be managed. High emotional intelligence allows individuals to read contextual cues, manage internal emotional states, choose language appropriately, respond to underlying psychological needs, and use expressive strategies that preserve relational harmony.

Ultimately, integrating emotional intelligence into the understanding of tense interactions equips communicators with the tools to transform potential conflict into opportunities for connection, growth, and mutual respect. Emotional intelligence, thus, not only supports effective communication but also strengthens the emotional fabric of interpersonal relationships in both personal and professional domains.

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