EmpowerMe™

MONICA MICHAEL SMITH

A RESEARCH BRIEF FROM EMPOWERME COACHING & COUNSELING

Entrepreneurial Emotional Intelligence

Defining the trainable capacity that determines whether a founder, and the company they are building, survives.

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The Empowerment Therapist

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Why This Matters Now

Founder mental health has moved from a private struggle to a recognized, researched problem. Studies on entrepreneurs, including work by Michael Freeman and Johan Wiklund, have found founders report depression, anxiety, and ADHD at markedly higher rates than the general working population. The isolation of building something from nothing, the identity fusion between founder and company, and decisions made on incomplete information with real money and other people's livelihoods attached, are now openly discussed rather than hidden.

What has not caught up is the support built specifically for that pressure. Emotional intelligence training exists, but most of it is built for managers inside stable organizations. Therapy exists, but it is built to resolve distress, not to train a founder for the particular, sustained demands of building a venture. Neither is designed for the person who is simultaneously the visionary, the operator, the emotional center of a team, and the one everyone else looks to when something breaks.

This brief lays the groundwork for a category built for that gap: Entrepreneurial Emotional Intelligence. It draws on two established bodies of research, the study of what an entrepreneur actually is, and the study of what emotional intelligence actually is, and joins them into a single, trainable framework.

> *Entrepreneurial ability is part static and part dynamic. The static part is a founder's dispositions and baseline wiring; the work is to identify it and design around it. The dynamic part is how a founder regulates themselves, reads others, and recovers under sustained pressure; the work is to train it. This brief focuses on defining that second part clearly, in its own right, before it can be taught.*
>
> THE CENTRAL THESIS

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What "Entrepreneur" Has Always Meant

Before the word meant "founder," it meant something more physical: a person who takes hold of something and carries it forward, at their own risk.

The word traces to the Old French entreprendre, "to undertake," built from entre- ("between") and prendre ("to take"), and it entered English in the early nineteenth century. It was Richard Cantillon, writing in the 1730s, who first gave the word its modern economic meaning: someone who buys resources at a known price and sells the result at an uncertain future price, and who therefore absorbs the risk everyone else is trying to avoid. Jean-Baptiste Say later sharpened the definition further, describing the entrepreneur as the person who shifts resources out of low-yield areas and into higher-yield ones. In both accounts, the entrepreneur is defined by action taken under uncertainty, not by an idea, a title, or a personality type.

Peter Drucker, writing two centuries later, kept that same spirit and made it teachable. He argued that entrepreneurs do not simply have flashes of inspiration; they practice a purposeful and organized search for change, and systematically test which changes create real opportunity. For Drucker, innovation was not a personality trait either. It was a discipline, something a person gets better at through structured practice, in the same way a surgeon or a pilot improves through drilled repetition rather than raw talent alone.

That is the through-line worth naming here: from Cantillon through Say to Drucker, the entrepreneur has never been defined as a fixed type of person. It has been defined as someone who takes action, under real uncertainty, using a method that can be learned and sharpened. Entrepreneurial Emotional Intelligence takes the same view of the emotional side of that work.

THE WORD, TRACED

Entreprendre (Old French, "to undertake") › Cantillon, 1730s (risk-bearer under uncertain prices) › Say, 1800 (shifts resources to higher yield) › Drucker, 1985 (systematic search for change, a learnable discipline)

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What Emotional Intelligence Actually Is

Emotional intelligence has an academic origin, a popular expansion, and a workplace-ready practice. All three matter for a founder-facing framework.

Salovey & Mayer, 1990: The Original Ability

Psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer coined the term in a 1990 academic paper, defining it as the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to tell them apart, and to use that information to guide thinking and action. Their contribution was treating emotional intelligence as a real, measurable mental ability, not a personality trait or a vague soft skill. This is the academic root everything else grew from.

Goleman, 1995: The Popularization, and the Trainable Claim

Daniel Goleman brought the concept to a mainstream audience and expanded it into five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. Goleman's most important contribution for this brief is not the five-part list, it is his insistence that these are learned capabilities rather than fixed, inborn traits. That single claim is the hinge this entire framework turns on: if emotional intelligence can be developed, a founder's regulation and relational skill can be trained the same way a sales skill or a financial skill can.

Bradberry: The Applied, Measurable Version

Travis Bradberry, co-author of Emotional Intelligence 2.0, narrowed the model into four practical skills, organized into two competencies: personal competence, made up of self-awareness and self-management, and social competence, made up of social awareness and relationship management. Bradberry's contribution was operational: turning an academic model into something that could be scored, tracked, and trained in a working professional's life, which is the same job the Entrepreneurial Index is built to do for founders.

RESEARCHER	CONTRIBUTION
Salovey & Mayer (1990)	Defined EI as a measurable mental ability, not a trait
Goleman (1995)	Popularized it; established that it is learned, not fixed
Bradberry (2009)	Made it practical, applied, and workplace-measurable

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The Definition: Entrepreneurial Emotional Intelligence

Put the two lineages together and the definition writes itself.

ENTREPRENEUR	+	EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
one who acts and bears risk under real uncertainty		a trainable ability to regulate self and read others

Entrepreneurial Emotional Intelligence (EEI) is the trainable capacity to notice, regulate, and act on one's own emotional state in real time, and to read and work with the emotional states of others, under the specific, sustained uncertainty of building a venture.

WORKING DEFINITION

Static and Dynamic: Two Different Kinds of Traits

A founder's entrepreneurial makeup is not one thing. Some of it is closer to fixed wiring: how much risk feels tolerable, how quickly a person notices an opportunity, the baseline appetite for autonomy. These traits shift slowly, if at all, and the useful move is to design a role and a team around them rather than fight them.

Other parts are dynamic. How a founder responds when a deal collapses, whether they can hear hard feedback without their self-regard collapsing or hardening, whether they read a co-founder's silence accurately or fill it with their own anxiety, how quickly they recover after a public failure. These are exactly the skills Goleman and Bradberry describe as learnable, and they are exactly the skills that determine whether a founding team survives its own success or its own stress.

STATIC (nature)	DYNAMIC (nurture, trainable)
Baseline risk tolerance	Reading emotional cues under pressure
Natural pattern recognition for opportunity	Pausing before an impulsive decision
Baseline drive and energy	Recovering after a public setback
Comfort with ambiguity	Repairing a strained co-founder relationship

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The Entrepreneurial Index: Six Dimensions

The Entrepreneurial Index is a free, seven-minute self-assessment built to bring this research into a founder's hands. It scores forty-two statements about how a person actually operates, across six dimensions research has repeatedly tied to how founders start, sustain, and scale ventures. Some of these dimensions sit closer to the static end, some closer to the dynamic, trainable end.

A Drive & Achievement Motivation
The appetite to set hard standards, pursue autonomy, and act before circumstances force you to.

B Opportunity Cognition
How readily you notice gaps, connect unrelated ideas, and judge which are worth pursuing.

C Uncertainty & Risk Orientation
Your comfort acting on incomplete information, and the decision logic you fall back on when the future cannot be predicted.

D Self-Regulation & Entrepreneurial Emotional Intelligence
How well you read and manage your own and others' emotional states under sustained pressure.

E Executional Persistence
Whether you sustain effort and structure through the long, unglamorous middle of building something.

F Social Influence & Alliance-Building
How you recruit believers and assemble a team whose strengths complement rather than mirror your own.

Dimension D is the one this brief has been building toward, and of the six it is both the most coachable and the one that most protects a founder from burnout. It is also the dimension where a high score elsewhere, most often Drive or Risk Orientation, becomes a liability rather than an asset: the same intensity that gets a company off the ground can bury a founder in half-finished initiatives, or in a partnership they cannot see is deteriorating until it breaks.

Some of the strongest evidence in the founding-team research points to complementarity: outcomes improve less because any single founder scores well on these six dimensions, and more because a team's strengths cover each other's gaps. Where two founders take the Index, the gap between their profiles is often the most useful information in the room.

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About Monica Michael Smith & The EmpowerMe Model

FOUNDERS THERAPIST TO ENTREPRENEURIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Monica Michael Smith, MA, CPLC, is the founder of EmpowerMe Coaching & Counseling. She wrote the Emotional Intelligence curriculum for two university schools of business and currently teaches it at Oklahoma Wesleyan University (OKWU). Her work takes that same classroom-built rigor and applies it to a population the standard curriculum was never designed for: founders carrying the identity fusion, public exposure, and isolation of building something under their own name.

The EmpowerMe Model is the structured, sequenced practice behind Entrepreneurial Emotional Intelligence training. It moves through four stages, in order, because each one depends on the one before it.

01 See Yourself
Recognize your entrepreneurial wiring as it actually operates: the pull toward novelty, the confidence that stops hearing feedback, the energy that outruns what you have processed.

02 Be Yourself
Build the pause between instinct and action, so a bold impulse gets tested before it is acted on, and hard feedback lands without your self-regard collapsing or hardening.

03 See Others
Read your co-founders, team, and investors accurately, and tell the difference between someone challenging your thinking and someone undermining it.

04 Be With Others
Lead and repair under pressure without losing your drive or the relationships the venture depends on.

The Entrepreneurial Index is the starting point: seven minutes, six scores, no sign-up required. Where a profile shows the gap sits in Dimension D, the EmpowerMe Model is built to close it.

EmpowerMe Coaching & Counseling
www.empowermecc.com

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This brief synthesizes published research on entrepreneurship and emotional intelligence for educational purposes. The Entrepreneurial Index is a self-report tool; scores describe tendencies, not fixed limits, and this brief is not a clinical assessment or a prediction of outcome.