Emotional Style

Based on research by Neuroscientist Dr Richard Davidson, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Director of the Centre for Healthy Minds. Richard Davidson has spent the last 30 years researching the relationship between meditation, emotions and brain health. He has found that by practising specific meditation exercises, it’s possible to change your brain and build well-being.

‘The Emotional Life of the Brain’ - How its unique patterns affect the way you think, feel and live - and how you can change them.

Discover the six Dimensions of Emotional Style, which show how you behave during social interactions, while facing adversity and while navigating life’s surprises.

Find out where you fall on the spectrum for each dimension of emotional style - resilience, outlook, social intuition, self-awareness, sensitivity to context and attention. These all relate to different brain circuits.

The Resilience Dimension

Answer each question TRUE or FALSE. The most accurate answers come from making quick judgements (No agonising over the answer!)

1. If I have a disagreement over a day-to-day activity (e.g. ‘It’s your turn to fill the dishwasher’) I feel upset for hours.
2. If a driver cuts in on me at a road merge I shake off the irritation rather than fume for ages.
3. Where I have experienced great sadness (a death of a close friend or loved one) it interferes with my ability to function for months.
4. If I made a mistake at work and was pulled up for it I accepted it as a learning experience.
5. If I find food/service at a restaurant poor it ruins my whole evening.
6. If stuck in traffic because of an accident ahead, I boil inside with frustration and still seethe beyond the bottleneck.
7. If the boiler breaks down I don’t react adversely because I know an engineer will be able to fix it.
8. If I meet someone I’d like to meet up with again but I’m given a brush-off, I feel upset for a long time.
9. If I was in the running for some award and it goes to someone I consider less worthy, I can move on quite quickly.
10. If I get tongue-tied at a social event when asked about myself I tend to replay the conversation over later - substituting what I should have said.

This part of the spectrum is marked by difficulty shaking off anger, sadness loss. hassle, setback or other upsetting events.
The Outlook Dimension
This measures not whether you can feel joy, but how well you can keep that feeling alive. Someone whose positive mood hangs around tends to be optimistic, while the opposite means joys are fleeting and you feel a bit pessimistic. Answer spontaneously TRUE or FALSE.

1. I look forward to meeting new people and reckon they will be worth knowing.
2. If I had to evaluate colleagues I concentrated on aspects of improvement rather than performance.
3. I believe the next few years will be better than the last few years.
4. If I was faced with moving to a new city it would seem quite scary.
5. When something small but positive happens out of the blue the positive effect on my mood fades quickly.
6. If I experience an event in a positive light at the start it does not last.
7. Viewing a beautiful sunset soon disappears from my consciousness.
8. If I think of a pleasant planned activity when I waken up, it puts me in a good frame of mind for the day.
9. Maybe a concert or gallery visit feels good at the start but quickly fades.
10. On busy days I happily move from one activity to the next without tiring.

The Social Intuition Dimension
This measures how empathetic and compassionate you are. This is associated with the visual cortex and your ability to read facial expressions and pick up on body language. Answer spontaneously TRUE or FALSE.

1. In conversation with people, I usually notice how they are feeling (e.g. discomfort, anger)
2. I find myself noting facial expressions or body language.
3. It does not matter whether I talk on the phone or face to face since I don’t get any more information from direct contact.
4. I feel I know more about people’s true feelings than they know themselves.
5. I’m surprised when someone gets angry or upset at something I said for no apparent reason.
6. In a restaurant I prefer to sit next to someone so I don’t have to see his/her full face.
7. I find myself responding to another person’s discomfort intuitively rather than through their actual words.
8. I like to observe people around me in a public space.
9. I find it uncomfortable making direct eye contact during conversation with a relative stranger.
10. I can often tell when something is bothering another person just by looking at him/her.
The Self Awareness Dimension
This measures how aware you are of your own internal bodily changes - raised heart rate, pulse, blood pressure. These are physiological and emotional cues. Answer spontaneously TRUE or FALSE.

1. When someone asks me why I am so angry/sad I think - ‘But I’m not.’
2. If someone asks me why I treated someone brusquely I disagree that I did.
3. I find that my heart is racing, pulse pounding (more than twice a month) without knowing why.
4. When I see someone in pain I feel emotionally and physically affected.
5. I sometimes notice aches and pains and have no idea where they came from.
6. I am usually sure enough about how I am feeling that I can put my emotions into words.
7. I like to spend time feeling quiet and relaxed, just feeling what is going on inside me.
8. I inhabit my body and feel at home and comfortable with it.
9. I am oriented to the external world and take little note of what is happening to my body.
10. When exercising I am sensitive to the changes it produces in my body.

An additional simple exercise to assess self awareness -
Have a partner take your pulse for 30 seconds while you direct your attention internally and try to detect your heartbeat. Take note of that figure. Then on your own focus your awareness on your internal bodily sensations and try and sense (without actually taking your pulse) your heartbeat and count the number of beats. Do four 30 sec. trials. Compare your counts with your partner’s figure. The closer the match the greater your self awareness.

Sensitivity to Context Dimension
This measures how attuned you are to the social environment. Are you tuned out or tuned in? Answer spontaneously TRUE or FALSE.

1. I have been told by someone close to me that I am usually sensitive to other people’s feelings.
2. I have been told occasionally that I have behaved in a socially inappropriate way, which surprise me.
3. I have sometimes had a fall out with a friend because I was too jovial when the friend was in an anxious frame of mind.
4. When I speak with people, I sometimes see them stepping back and increasing the distance between us.
5. I often find myself censoring what I say - telling a white lie - to avoid possibly upsetting someone.
6. When in a public setting like a restaurant, I am aware of modulating how loudly I speak.
7. I am often reminded not to mention people’s names who might be within earshot in a public place.
8. I am usually aware of whether I have been in a place/street before, even if several years may have passed.
9. I notice when someone is acting in a way that seems out of place.
10. I’ve been told by people close to me that I show good manners with strangers and in new situations.

**The Attention Dimension**

This measures how well you can screen out emotional distractions and focus in an unflappable way on the task in hand. Are you focused or unfocused? Answer spontaneously TRUE or FALSE.

1. I can concentrate in a noisy environment.
2. When there is a lot going on (in a crowded airport) I can keep myself from getting lost in a train of thought about any particular thing I see.
3. If I decide to focus on a particular task, I am mostly able to sustain it.
4. If working at home, the household noises (TV/others’ voices) distract me.
5. If I sit quietly for a few minutes, my mind fills with a rush of thoughts and I jump from one thing to another.
6. An unexpected distraction does not keep me from refocusing again on the task in hand.
7. During inactive periods in public places (a bus/train journey) I notice a lot of things around me.
8. When I have something important that needs my focused attention I find the quietest place I can to work.
9. I am easily distracted by events in my environment and hooked into what’s happening.
10. I find it easy to talk with someone in a crowded situation as I can tune out others and make out what the person is saying.