WHITE PAPER

Team Emotional Intelligence in the Age of AI

Building the Relational Infrastructure for Human-AI Collaboration

Core thesis

The success of AI adoption will not be determined only by the intelligence of machines. It will be shaped by the capability of team members to work together to define and align how they collectively adopt AI to achieve their goals. We propose that strong team emotional intelligence is essential for supporting the continuous shared decision making and collaboration necessary as technology evolves.

A white paper draft for The European Center of Team Emotional Intelligence

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Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing how work is designed, coordinated, and performed. Yet most AI adoption strategies still focus primarily on tools, individual skills, and technical literacy. These capabilities are necessary, but they are not sufficient. AI adoption also introduces a relational challenge: it changes how teams make decisions, share knowledge, manage uncertainty, distribute work, and collaborate across boundaries.

This white paper argues that Team Emotional Intelligence (Team EI) offers a practical and scalable framework for addressing that challenge. Individual emotional intelligence remains essential: it helps people manage fear, ambiguity, defensiveness, and identity threat. But in the context of AI, many of the most important questions are collective: When should we use AI? How do we verify its outputs? What remains human? How do we learn together? How do we avoid creating a new gap between AI power users and those who feel left behind?

Team EI focuses on the norms, routines, and interaction patterns that enable groups to create trust, psychological safety, collaborative learning, and social capital. In the AI era, these norms become the relational infrastructure that allows teams not only to adopt new tools, but to redesign work responsibly and collectively.

The paper also explores a second opportunity: AI itself can support the development of Team EI. Used responsibly, AI can help teams observe collaboration patterns, receive timely feedback, improve retrospectives, strengthen cross-team coordination, and build a more evidence-informed understanding of how work actually flows. AI can become a collaboration mirror: a system that helps teams see their patterns more clearly, not a system that monitors or judges individuals.

The central argument is clear: the future of AI adoption will not be determined only by the intelligence of machines. It will be shaped by the emotional intelligence of the teams and organizations that use them.

> **KEY DISTINCTION**
> *Individual EI helps people face change. Team EI helps groups redesign the conditions in which change happens.*

1. The AI Adoption Challenge Is Becoming a Collaboration Challenge

AI adoption has entered a new phase. Organizations are no longer asking only whether AI matters; they are asking how to move from experimentation to sustained impact. Recent research shows that AI use is spreading rapidly, but the gap between adoption and enterprise-level value remains significant. McKinsey's 2025 Global Survey reports that nearly nine out of ten respondents say their organizations use AI in at least one business function, yet only about one-third report that their companies have begun to scale AI programs. The same research highlights workflow redesign as a critical factor in AI value creation.

This matters because workflow redesign is not a purely technical activity. It is a social process. When AI enters a workflow, it changes roles, decision rights, status dynamics, accountability, learning loops, and the boundary between human judgment and machine output. These shifts are experienced most directly in teams: in meetings, handoffs, reviews, decision forums, customer interactions, and moments of uncertainty.

Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index describes the emergence of the 'Frontier Firm': organizations in which people work alongside AI agents and where human-agent collaboration begins to reshape how work is structured. Whether or not every organization adopts that language, the direction is clear. AI is becoming a member of the work system. It is not merely a tool used by individuals; it is increasingly part of the coordination fabric of teams.

This changes the adoption question. The question is no longer only: Are our people ready for AI? The deeper question is: Are our teams emotionally and relationally ready to redesign the way work gets done?

2. Individual Emotional Intelligence Matters — But It Is Not Enough

Any human-centered approach to AI must recognize the importance of individual emotional intelligence. People need to manage ambiguity, regulate anxiety, remain open to learning, and avoid defensive reactions when their professional identity is challenged. Leaders, in particular, need the capacity to acknowledge concerns, communicate with empathy, and guide teams through uncertainty.

AI can trigger powerful emotional responses. For some, it creates excitement and curiosity. For others, it raises concerns about job security, status, competence, control, or ethical risk. These responses are not irrational distractions from adoption; they are part of adoption. People do not adopt transformative technologies as isolated cognitive processors. They adopt them as members of social systems in which they seek belonging, recognition, fairness, and meaning.

The limitation of an exclusively individual approach is that AI adoption does not happen only inside the individual. It happens through collective routines. A team decides whether AI outputs are trusted. A team determines whether experimentation is safe. A team creates or avoids stigma around asking basic questions. A team decides whether knowledge about AI is shared or hoarded. A team defines what quality means when human and machine contributions are combined.

For this reason, the argument is not that individual emotional intelligence is irrelevant. It is that individual emotional intelligence must be embedded in emotionally intelligent team norms. Individual EI helps people face change. Team EI helps groups redesign the conditions in which change happens.

3. Team Emotional Intelligence as Relational Infrastructure

Vanessa Urch Druskat defines Team Emotional Intelligence as a group culture created by norms that build a productive social and emotional environment, leading to cooperative interactions, collaborative work processes, and more effective performance. The key insight is systemic: team performance depends not only on the individual qualities of team members, but on the interaction patterns that allow those qualities to be used well.

This distinction is critical in the AI era. Organizations cannot build an emotionally intelligent AI culture one person at a time. AI is evolving too quickly, and its impact is too interdependent. Teams need visible, practical, revisable norms that guide how they learn, experiment, disagree, verify, escalate, and support one another.

Team EI offers exactly that: a way to make the emotional and relational conditions of collaboration explicit. It asks teams to define how they help one another succeed, how they learn and advance together, and how they engage stakeholders beyond the team. These three clusters become a practical map for AI adoption because AI affects all three levels at once.

At the first level, teams need to support members who are at different stages of AI confidence and capability. At the second level, teams need to reflect on how AI is changing their work and create safe learning loops. At the third level, teams need to coordinate with other teams, functions, and stakeholders so that AI does not become a set of isolated experiments.

In this sense, Team EI is not a soft add-on to digital transformation. It is the relational infrastructure that enables digital transformation to become sustainable.

4. Applying the Nine Team EI Norms to AI Adoption

The Team EI model becomes particularly useful when translated into the practical questions teams face as they adopt AI. Each norm can be interpreted as a capability for responsible, inclusive, and high-performance AI adoption.

Table 1. The Nine Team EI Norms Applied to AI Adoption

Team EI norm	Relevance for AI adoption
Understand team members	Explore different levels of AI confidence, fear, curiosity, capability, and resistance. Understand what each person needs to contribute effectively in an AI-enabled workflow.
Demonstrate caring	Support people who feel exposed, threatened, confused, or left behind. Make AI learning a shared responsibility rather than an individual survival
Address unacceptable behavior	Prevent AI shaming, exclusion, irresponsible delegation, hidden misuse, or behavior that undermines trust around AI adoption.
Review the team	Regularly assess how AI is changing collaboration, decision quality, workload, learning, and performance. Adapt norms as the technology
Support expression	Create safe spaces to discuss doubts, fears, ethical questions, and minority viewpoints before AI decisions become normalized.
Build optimism	Help the team see AI as a field of possibility and agency, not only as a source of threat or disruption.
Solve problems proactively	Anticipate risks such as inaccuracy, bias, overreliance, role confusion, knowledge gaps, and workflow disruption.
Understand team context	Read stakeholder expectations, regulatory constraints, customer impact, data dependencies, and organizational priorities.
Build external relationships	Collaborate across functions to scale learning, avoid duplicated experiments, share practices, and build organizational AI capability.

The practical value of this translation is that it shifts AI adoption from a generic change agenda to a set of observable, discussable, and improvable team practices.

5. New Norms for Human-AI Collaboration

AI adoption requires new norms because AI introduces new forms of ambiguity. Traditional team norms may not specify when AI should be used, how its outputs should be verified, who is accountable for AI-assisted work, or how to disclose the use of AI to colleagues, customers, or stakeholders.

Teams therefore need explicit norms for human-AI collaboration. These norms should not be designed only by technology or compliance functions. They should be shaped by the teams who understand the work, the risks, and the human consequences of changing how tasks are performed.

A useful starting point is to define norms across six questions: purpose, disclosure, verification, accountability, learning, and escalation.

Table 2. Six Norm Areas for Human-AI Collaboration

Norm area	Guiding question
Purpose	What types of tasks should AI support, and what types should remain primarily
Disclosure	When should team members make visible that AI has been used?
Verification	What quality checks are required before AI-assisted work is used or shared?
Accountability	Who is responsible for decisions, outputs, and consequences when AI is
Learning	How will the team share prompts, use cases, failures, and improvements?
Escalation	When should uncertainty, risk, bias, or ethical concern be escalated to another person or function?

These norms should be treated as living agreements. As AI tools and agents evolve, teams need to review and update their agreements rather than assuming that one policy can settle every future question.

6. AI as an Enabler of Team Emotional Intelligence

The relationship between AI and Team EI is not one-directional. AI creates the need for stronger Team EI, but AI can also support the development of Team EI. This is one of the most promising opportunities for organizations that want AI adoption to be both effective and human-centered.

If Team EI is built through norms that teams establish, test, and continually review, AI can help make those norms more visible and actionable. Many of the dynamics that shape collaboration are difficult to observe in real time: who speaks and who remains silent, where decisions get stuck, which handoffs create friction, where knowledge is concentrated, which teams are isolated, and whether disagreement is expressed constructively or suppressed.

AI systems can help teams read these patterns. Algorithms can analyze collaboration signals from meeting transcripts, project workflows, decision logs, retrospectives, communication platforms, and knowledge repositories. The purpose should not be to measure emotions or classify people. The purpose should be to identify recurring interaction patterns that either support or undermine trust, learning, inclusion, speed, and performance.

This makes AI a potential collaboration mirror. It can help teams see themselves more clearly. It can surface questions that are often invisible until they become performance problems: Are the same voices dominating? Are risks being mentioned but not assigned? Are decisions being reopened repeatedly? Are AI insights being shared across the team or held by a few specialists? Are handoffs between teams improving or deteriorating?

AI agents could also support real-time or near-real-time collaboration coaching. After a meeting, an agent might summarize not only the content, but also collaboration patterns: the decision was unclear, assumptions were not tested, one stakeholder group was not represented, a concern was raised but not resolved, or the discussion moved too quickly from problem exploration to solution. During work, an agent might remind the team of agreed AI norms, suggest a retrospective prompt, identify duplicated work across teams, or connect people facing similar problems.

The opportunity is not to outsource collaboration to AI. The opportunity is to use AI to improve the human conversation about collaboration. The meaning of the data must remain a human responsibility. AI can show patterns, ask questions, and provide prompts; teams must decide what those patterns mean and which norms they want to strengthen.

Table 3. How AI Can Support Team Emotional Intelligence

AI-enabled capability	How it can support Team EI
Team diagnostics	Identify patterns in participation, decision flow, learning loops, workload, unresolved issues, and recurring friction.
Meeting feedback	Provide summaries of decisions, risks, ownership, participation balance, and unresolved assumptions.
Retrospective support	Generate reflective prompts, compare intended norms with observed patterns, and help teams review progress over time.
Cross-team mapping	Surface dependencies, bottlenecks, duplicated work, isolated teams, and fragile boundary-spanning relationships.
Knowledge sharing	Capture experiments, prompts, lessons learned, and use cases so that learning travels beyond one team.
Norm nudging	Remind teams of agreed principles for AI use, verification, disclosure, escalation, and inclusion.

7. Ethical Guardrails: A Collaboration Mirror, Not Emotional Surveillance

The possibility of AI-supported Team EI comes with an important warning. Used poorly, AI that analyzes collaboration can easily become a surveillance system. If people believe algorithms are judging their emotions, ranking their behavior, or turning every interaction into a performance score, psychological safety will be damaged rather than strengthened.

For a European organization, this is not only a cultural concern. It is also a governance concern. The EU AI Act positions AI as a matter of trust, risk management, fundamental rights, transparency, and human oversight. Any use of AI to support collaboration must therefore be designed with a clear human-centered purpose and strong safeguards.

The guiding principle should be simple: AI should help teams learn, not help organizations silently evaluate individuals. It should support collective reflection, not individual surveillance. It should create better conversations, not replace them.

Table 4. Ethical Guardrails for AI-Supported Team EI

Guardrail	What it means in practice
Transparency	People should know what data is used, why it is used, and how insights are
Consent and participation	Teams should be involved in defining the purpose and acceptable use of collaboration analytics.
Privacy by design	Data should be minimized, protected, and used only for clearly defined
Aggregate learning	Insights should prioritize team and system patterns, not individual ranking or hidden evaluation.
Human interpretation	AI should surface patterns and prompts; humans should interpret meaning
No emotion scoring	Organizations should avoid claims that AI can reliably infer or judge inner
Psychological safety	Any use of AI must strengthen people's willingness to speak, learn, challenge, and experiment.
Governance and review	Use cases should be periodically reviewed for unintended consequences and alignment with values.

8. From Teams to a Team-of-Teams Organization

The next frontier of AI adoption is not individual productivity. It is cross-team coordination. The most valuable AI use cases typically cut across functions: HR, IT, legal, compliance, operations, sales, marketing, finance, product, customer care, and strategy. No single team can redesign these workflows alone.

This is why organizations need to think beyond team effectiveness and toward a team-of-teams model. In a team-of-teams organization, teams are autonomous but connected. They can move quickly locally while remaining aligned through shared norms, trusted relationships, and mechanisms for learning across boundaries.

Team EI is essential at this level because the emotional and relational challenges of AI often intensify across boundaries. One function may emphasize speed; another may emphasize risk. One team may see AI as an innovation opportunity; another may see compliance exposure. One group may control the data; another may own the customer relationship. Without relational capital, these differences easily become friction, delay, or fragmentation.

AI can support this broader system by mapping dependencies, surfacing repeated handoff problems, connecting teams working on similar challenges, and making learning more transferable. But technology alone will not create a team-of-teams organization. The organization must intentionally build cross-team norms: how teams share experiments, how they escalate risks, how they coordinate decisions, how they

build trust across functional boundaries, and how they preserve human accountability when AI enters shared workflows.

9. The AI-Team EI Flywheel

A useful way to understand the relationship between AI and Team EI is as a flywheel. Team EI creates the trust needed to experiment with AI responsibly. Responsible experimentation creates learning. Learning requires reflection. Reflection strengthens norms. Better norms improve collaboration. Better collaboration accelerates AI adoption. Effective and responsible AI use reinforces trust.

This flywheel is important because AI adoption is not a single implementation event. It is a continuous learning process. Tools will change. Agents will become more capable. Regulation will evolve. Workflows will be redesigned repeatedly. Teams therefore need a social system that can learn continuously without burning out or fragmenting.

- Trust enables responsible experimentation.
- Experimentation creates shared learning.
- Learning requires reflection and psychological safety.
- Reflection strengthens team norms.
- Better norms improve collaboration and decision quality.
- Better collaboration accelerates AI adoption and scaling.
- Responsible AI use reinforces trust.

> **THE FLYWHEEL**
> *Team EI creates the trust required to use AI responsibly. AI can help teams observe, practice, and scale Team EI. The two capabilities can reinforce each other when governed with transparency and care.*

10. A Maturity Model for AI-Enabled Team EI

Organizations can use a simple maturity model to assess where they are and what to develop next. The model is not intended as a rigid diagnostic instrument, but as a practical conversation tool for leaders, teams, HR, transformation offices, and coaches.

Table 5. A Maturity Model for AI-Enabled Team EI

Stage	Description
1. Tool Adoption	AI use is individual, informal, and uneven. Teams focus on learning tools, but norms are implicit.
2. Safe Experimentation	Teams create spaces to test AI, discuss concerns, and share early lessons without judgment.
3. Team Norms	Teams define explicit norms for AI use, verification, disclosure,
4. Cross-Team Integration	Teams coordinate AI practices across functions, share learning, and manage dependencies.
5. AI-Enabled Team EI	AI supports collaboration diagnostics, retrospectives, knowledge sharing, and cross-team relational capital.
6. Relational Governance	The organization governs AI adoption through trust, transparency, human oversight, and mature team-of-teams collaboration.

11. Implications for Leaders

Leaders play a decisive role in shaping how teams emotionally interpret AI. If leaders frame AI only as a productivity mandate, teams may comply while hiding fear, uncertainty, or misuse. If leaders frame AI only as a risk, teams may avoid experimentation. The leadership challenge is to create a balanced environment: ambitious about what AI can enable, realistic about its risks, and intentional about the norms that support responsible use.

Leaders should treat AI adoption as a team transformation, not only a training initiative. This means asking not just who has completed AI literacy training, but how teams are changing their ways of working. Are they reviewing AI use together? Are they learning from failed experiments? Are they discussing quality and ethics? Are they including quieter voices? Are they building cross-team relationships? Are they using AI to strengthen collaboration rather than bypass it?

The leadership role is therefore both technical and cultural. Leaders do not need to be the most advanced AI users in the room. They do need to be designers of the conditions in which teams can learn, speak honestly, experiment responsibly, and adapt together.

Recommended Leadership Actions

1. Treat AI adoption as a team and organizational transformation, not only an individual skills agenda.
2. Make AI-related emotions discussable: fear, curiosity, excitement, skepticism, status anxiety, and ethical concern.
3. Define explicit team norms for AI use, including purpose, disclosure, verification, accountability, learning, and escalation.
4. Create recurring rituals for shared experimentation, reflection, and knowledge transfer.
5. Use AI to support collaboration insight, but avoid emotional surveillance and individual ranking.
6. Build cross-team relational capital before scaling AI into complex workflows.
7. Measure not only AI productivity, but also collaboration quality, learning speed, trust, and adoption health.
8. Develop leaders as culture managers who can shape emotionally intelligent norms in AI-enabled teams.
9. Govern AI with a human-centered approach that protects privacy, transparency, psychological safety, and human accountability.
10. Position Team EI as a strategic capability for responsible AI adoption, not as a soft or peripheral topic.

12. Conclusion: The Human System Around the Machine

AI will continue to become more capable, more agentic, and more embedded in everyday work. But the central challenge for organizations will not be only how intelligent their AI systems are. It will be how intelligent their human systems are around those technologies.

Organizations that focus only on tools may achieve isolated productivity gains. Organizations that focus on individual AI literacy may create more capable users. But organizations that build Team Emotional Intelligence can create the conditions for sustainable adoption: trust, learning, psychological safety, responsible experimentation, and cross-team coordination.

This is the strategic opportunity for The European Center of Team Emotional Intelligence: to position Team EI as a core capability for human-centered AI transformation. In the European context, where trust, human dignity, transparency, and responsible governance are central values, Team EI offers a practical bridge between technological innovation and the quality of human collaboration.

The future of AI adoption will not be determined only by the intelligence of machines. It will be shaped by the emotional intelligence of the teams that use them, the norms they create, and the relational capital they build across the organization.

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