

## **The Importance of Emotional Intelligence to Fisheries Management**

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### **ABSTRACT**

There is a growing awareness that fisheries management is really about people management. It is about influencing the people who utilize and impact on the fisheries resources to behave in a particular way. It is also about utilizing the experiences of those people to inform and transform the fisheries management process, so that the goals of fisheries management may be reached in a more efficient and cost effective manner. As a result of this understanding, fisheries management is evolving into a discipline that is paying more attention to participatory management of fisheries resources by placing increasing emphasis on utilizing fisher's knowledge. It is no longer accepted that Government officials or scientists have all the answers. Other persons need to be involved if we are to find workable solutions to our problems. If the above premise is true, then it is time that fisheries managers move away from relying solely on their technical skills and pay more attention to improving their people skills. This paper explores a relatively new concept, that of "emotional intelligence" and demonstrates that by improving our abilities to relate to people (that is our emotional competencies) we can indeed become more effective fisheries managers.

**KEY WORDS:** Emotional intelligence, participatory fisheries management

## **La Importancia de la Inteligencia Emocional a la Gerencia de las Industrias Pesqueras**

Hay una conciencia creciente de que la administración de la industria pesquera se trata realmente de una administración popular. Se trata de influenciar a las personas que utilizan los recursos pesqueros para comportarse de una manera particular. Se trata también de utilizar las experiencias de esas personas para informar y transformar la administración del proceso pesquero, de manera que puedan ser alcanzados los objetivos administrativos de las empresas pesqueras de una manera más eficiente y efectiva. Como resultado de este entendimiento, la administración de las empresas pesqueras está evolucionando hacia una disciplina que presta mayor atención a la administración de forma participativa de los recursos pesqueros haciendo mayor énfasis en la utilización del conocimiento de los pescadores. Ya no se acepta que los representantes del Gobierno o los científicos

tengan todas las respuestas. Necesitamos incluir a otras personas si nos disponemos a encontrar soluciones realmente manejables para nuestros problemas. Si la premisa antes mencionada es verdadera, entonces es hora que los administradores de la empresa pesquera se alejen de la idea de confiar únicamente en sus conocimientos técnicos y presten mayor atención al mejoramiento de sus propias destrezas. Este informe explora un concepto relativamente Nuevo, el de la "inteligencia emocional" y demuestra que mejorando nuestras habilidades para relacionarnos con las personas (es decir, nuestra competencia emocional) podemos sin dudas convertirnos en más eficientes administradores de la industria pesquera.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Inteligencia emocional, la administratcion de la industria pesquera

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Case for People Management**

Who would argue about the need to manage fisheries resources? The myth that fisheries resources are inexhaustible has long since collapsed, as have many fish stocks that have been inappropriately managed. It is widely accepted that in the absence of management, the benefits that the fisheries produce will diminish. Even though some members of fish species survive, they will not be worth fishing for i.e. they would have become commercially extinct (Berkes et al, 2001). In extreme cases these species may even become biologically extinct.

While many Caribbean fisheries are organised and conducted in ways which will inevitably lead to overfishing (Haughton and Singh-Renton 2001), a future can still be envisaged whereby fisheries make a sustained contribution to food security, poverty alleviation, employment, foreign trade, foreign exchange earnings, cultural development, development of communities, recreation and tourism, and thus, to the livelihood and sustenance of the people of the region.

However, to attain this vision marine resources must be managed to provide society with optimal benefits without compromising the long-term health of fish stocks or marine ecosystems. The factors which constrain proper management include: irresponsible fishing practices; inadequate knowledge of fish stocks, the marine ecosystem and the social and economic conditions of the fishers; inadequate long-term policies; inadequate human and institutional capacity for research, planning and decision making; inadequate participation of resource users in planning and decision-making; inadequate monitoring, control and surveillance; inadequate post harvest handling, processing and marketing; inadequate port and other shore-based facilities; environmental degradation and pollution of the region's marine waters, and scarce financial resources.

If you think about it, most of the factors cited above are about people. They are not about fish. They are about influencing the way people think and behave in order to achieve specific goals associated with fisheries management. In fact, the goals of

fisheries management are not about fish either, they are about maintaining and enhancing the services and products that fisheries resources provide to humans, whether those services be ecological, aesthetic, psychological, etc.

In essence then, it might be reasonable to suggest that effective fisheries management is really a matter of how successfully people who participate in the fisheries sector collaborate with each other in order to achieve particular goals. If we accept the above, then it is fair to state that while it is important for persons involved in the management of fisheries resources to have technical skills, it is also important for them to have “people skills”.

These concepts are not new ones, Charles (2001) recognised that it is difficult to place environmental factors as primary considerations in decision-making on the use of natural resources. The comments of several authors point to insights about the role of people and people management in the fisheries management. Consider the following contributions:

- i) Haughton and Singh-Renton (2001), indicate that in order to achieve this goal it becomes necessary to improve awareness of fisheries issues and the capacity of resources users to work in partnership with government to jointly manage fisheries,
- ii) Nelson (1995 cited in Haughton and Singh-Renton, 2001), states that “The central issue is that it is the people working in fisheries, their knowledge of the issues in fisheries and ability to build positive networks of stakeholders that are the real basis for achieving our developmental goals”, and
- iii) Delaney (2002) suggests that if we put the “spotlight on the human factor” we may find that we already have the tools required to better manage our fisheries resources.

FAO (1997), Bunce et. al. (2000) and others including the participants at the Symposium on Caribbean Marine Protected Areas: Practical Approaches to Achieve Economic and Conservation Goals, held during the 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI 2003), identified a number of gaps in management effectiveness. Among the measures suggested to fill these gaps were:

- i) Train managers in communications skills;
- ii) Understand stakeholders needs via improved stakeholder assessments;
- iii) Require ... scientists to meet together with the community ... in order to understand their needs and share perspectives
- iv) Overcome incorrect perceptions.

The above contributions point to the need to travel a management route that is not just grounded in “stark” science, but instead take a softer approach that considers the “people aspects”. This often requires more than just a seemingly objective assessment of the situation. It brings to bear information that we know intuitively, but not as yet cognitively. It acknowledges that we sometimes have to use what is often referred to as a “gut feeling” about whether a situation is viable or

a particular stakeholder is trustworthy.

From another perspective, it is recognised that “people who will be affected by (our actions as managers) must be willing to place their faith, and possibly their livelihoods, on conclusions drawn by scientists” (Roberts and Hawkins 2000: parentheses ours).

In this paper we explore a concept called Emotional Intelligence (EI). We have chosen this concept because it is a scientific way of explaining something that we always knew, but had not before put words to. We want to encourage discussion on this topic because we feel that it is relevant. We also want to come closer to answering some of the questions that we have (Figure 1.). We ask you to join us on this journey, to carefully consider the information that we have presented, and to use it where it can be beneficial. We also ask you to continue to share your experiences in this area so that, over time, we can increase the collective wisdom that we have in this area and use these insights to generate an improved approach to fisheries management.

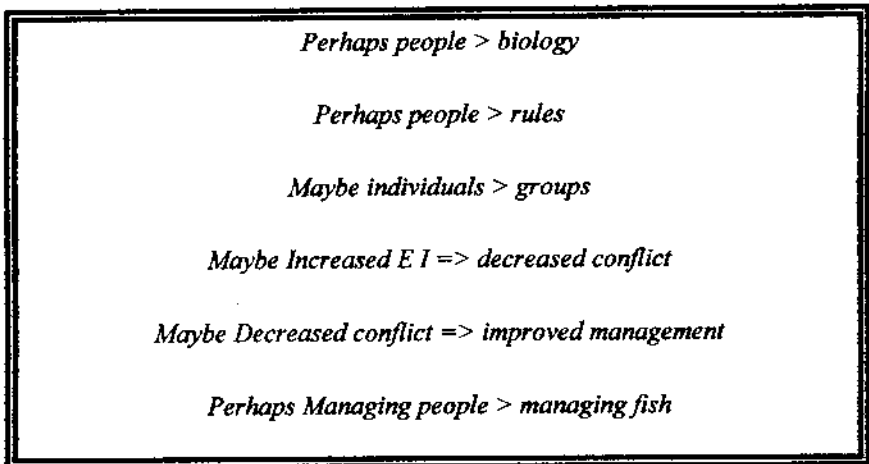


Figure 1. Some considerations about the role of people in fisheries management

## WHAT IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

### **Emotional Intelligence (EI) – the Definition**

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to use feelings in order to interact smoothly with others and accomplish common goals (Goleman 1998). Stated another way, emotional intelligence is the ability to access, manage and make use of feelings. It means managing feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively. There is a growing view that this ability may be far more important to ongoing success than intellectual knowledge or technical skill (Harris 2001). Goleman

(1998) suggests that with increasing job complexity, emotional intelligence becomes more important; he suggests that it may be four times more important than cognitive abilities in explaining different levels of performance (*ibid.*). Goleman (1998) also suggests that while technical ability may be a requirement to enter a particular field, it is emotional intelligence that may determine success. It is important to state that Emotional Intelligence is really nothing new, people have always been aware of the presence and importance of what we now refer to as EI. However, they may not previously have had the extensive vocabulary now associated with this discipline, and may have been limited to the use of words such as character and charisma.

The concept of EI is based on a long history of research and theory in psychology (Cherniss 2000), and has developed out of the advances made in neuroscience in the last century (Goleman 1995).

Emotional intelligence involves many competencies or abilities that may be either personal or social (Boyatzis 1994 cited in Boyatzis et al. 2000). An emotional competence is a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance (Goleman 1998). Our emotional competencies show how much of that potential we have is translated into on-the-job capabilities.

Personal competencies rest largely on self-awareness and include characteristics such as self-control, adaptability, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, creativity, and innovativeness. Social competencies involve awareness of others. They may include empathy, political awareness, the ability to understand others' emotions, and other talents or skills needed to influence, communicate, lead, develop others, manage conflict, promote teamwork, or catalyze change.

Emotional intelligence is observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation (Boyatzis et. al. 2000).

It is important to note that simply having a high level of emotional intelligence does not guarantee that a person will have learned the emotional competencies that matter for work, it only means that they have good potential to learn them Goleman's (1998). The fact that EI can be learned is important to remember, as it indicates that people have the potential to improve on their current capabilities and on their effectiveness in the "workplace".

### **Emotional Intelligence – the Application**

So the above is a lot of "mumbo jumbo", good to hear about — but so what? How do we relate this to our daily reality and what is the relevance of this subject to fisheries management? Let's reflect on some of our collective experiences and see if there are any lessons that can be learned from them.

Have you ever been in a meeting/group with specific objectives (say consideration of a fisheries management plan), and gotten the feeling that the whole exercise was going nowhere? That while the persons in the room should (theoretically, at least) have the technical expertise and insights to solve the problems, other things were interfering with the group's ability to achieve its

purpose?

Have you ever been in a fisheries sector organization where you have felt stifled? Where you knew that you had the potential to contribute more, but somehow you were not being allowed?

What about a situation where a person who has excellent technical skills has been recruited, and you look forward to the promise of their contribution but are disappointed, because, in spite of their technical expertise their "attitude" and "approach" do not allow for their expertise to make the difference that it should?

To look at more positive scenarios, have you ever been struggling with a program or an assignment and a conversation with a colleague (possibly with less technical expertise than you have) has caused you to feel motivated, to try again where you would have given up, and to excel where you might have failed? How about those (hopefully not rare) occurrences when you walk into a working group and there is a synergy, a dynamic, that causes the group to reach its full potential, and to achieve effortlessly what it would otherwise have struggled to do.

While most of us may have at least one of these types of experiences, we may not necessarily have been able to "put our finger" on the reasons why these situations occur. We would like to suggest that it is the human factor. As human beings, we need to be listened to, valued, empathized with, understood. We perform best in situations where we are comfortable, where our needs are met, where we are encouraged to excel, where we feel empowered.

Good fisheries management plans and programs are not always enough to ensure successful fisheries management. We need good people, good relationships and good organizations, to effect these plans. Often, "great" written plans are produced, but never implemented.

Technical expertise, insight, and wisdom together provide an important platform for change, but in order to actually achieve this change, people have to be involved. In fisheries management, for example, a wide array of persons from differing backgrounds (fishermen, fish processors, economists, politicians, fisheries scientist, lawyers) all have to be able to come to common understandings and, to agree on and achieve common goals.

In order for so many persons to work together to achieve so much, it is important for the individuals and groups involved to have certain emotional competencies. The persons must be competent as individuals (personal competence), but they must also have certain collective competencies (social competence). Goleman (1998) argues that it is the emotional competencies that often make the difference between success and failure. Competencies such as self-control, self-confidence, adaptability, innovation, ability to manage human diversity, ability to manage conflict, and ability to manage effective teams are important in any job, but even more important in complex jobs, such as the interdisciplinary jobs so common in fisheries management.

Since emotional competencies can be learned (Goleman 1998), by putting forth some effort, persons can improve their emotional competencies, thereby enhancing their ability to cope positively in the wide variety of work-related situations that they

might encounter. It is not necessary to discuss the entire range of emotional competencies here: this is done thoroughly by Goleman (1998). However, in the next few paragraphs, a few emotional competencies will be chosen and discussed within the context of fisheries management and the fisheries manager.

### **Emotional Intelligence and the Individual**

Every individual has an impact (positive or negative) on the individuals around him or her. Sometimes it only takes one individual who is out of "sync" to destroy the work of the entire group. This impact is especially significant if the person is the group leader, or the person who is seen to have the most technical skills. It is therefore important to analyze the emotional competencies of the individual. One key competence is to know one's strengths and weaknesses and to be honest about them. In a discipline such as Fisheries Management, it is not possible for one person to have all the answers. If one has an accurate idea of one's strengths and weaknesses, it is easier to understand in what areas one can best contribute to the goals of fisheries management and where one needs to go for help. This can save the time energy and money that is lost if one consistently tackles and fails in tasks that one is not suited for.

Another important competence is that of self-confidence. Persons who are confident in their selves and their abilities, are more likely to achieve the goals of their organizations. Too many persons make the excuse that "I can't make any difference" or, "The Ministers of Government will do what they want anyway". Such thinking sabotages the creative thought process, as persons resign themselves to an outcome, rather than seeking a creative solution to the challenges that they face. Confidence and creativity are important in fisheries management. To some extent, every situation encountered is unique. The same situation occurring in two different countries may require different approaches. Cultural, social, political, and personality differences can often mean that a solution that works successfully in one place is likely to be a failure in another place. Innovative thinking therefore becomes an important criteria for success, those who are both innovative and confident are more likely to be able to achieve the goals of fisheries management.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Working Groups/teams**

In the discipline of fisheries management, it is common to have working groups and teams of all types. Fisheries Advisory Committees and Councils, working groups to assess the biological status of fisheries resources, teams to address certain problems such as fish kills, are not only common, but necessary. The trans-boundary nature of many fisheries resources means that it is common for many of these working groups/teams to be regional or international. Members of these teams often come from different cultures, different social and economic backgrounds and different areas of technical expertise. Often, they have to function and make complex decisions against the backdrop of financial constraints, as well as constraints of time, information and restrictive mandate.

In these situations, certain social competencies are necessary. Good leadership is a must, or the group may be left floundering, or may lose a lot of time before it finds its way. However, within this setting, there is a need for other emotional competencies, such as the ability to work together as a team, the ability to understand each other and to communicate clearly, and the ability to manage conflict and to work together towards common goals. While this may seem obvious, far too often team facilitators/leaders may be chosen based on their technical skills alone, or their post, with very little reference to their people skills/competencies. This may have the potential to cause frustration and lack of trust and may lead to a team that under performs, or worse still is ineffective.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Fisheries Organizations**

Most fisheries managers function within the context of a fisheries organization, whether it is a government organization or a fishers' organization. Often these organizations have excellent strategic management plans and fisheries management plans. Far too often these plans are either not implemented, or are implemented in a time frame that does not allow the organization to make efficient and effective use of its resources. It is not uncommon for these organizations to have persons who are individually excellent in their fields, but fail to translate this into organizational excellence. Often there are several persons who have the potential to contribute significantly to the organization, but few who actually do. In some cases thousands of dollars have been invested in training persons, but this training seems to have little effect on individual and organizational effectiveness.

These examples may point to shortcomings in the emotional intelligence of the organization. Within most organizations it is the technical and reporting relationships that are emphasized (organizational structure). Recruitment is often based on technical competencies alone. We suggest that fisheries organizations should pay more attention to the people side of things. Persons should be recruited based not only on their technical competencies, but on the other emotional competencies needed for doing the job. Training should be determined on an individual basis and should seek to build on the emotional competencies necessary for fulfilling the role that the person plays in the organization. There should be commitment to the development of persons in the organization i.e. recognizing and meeting their development needs. There should be a focus on building collaborative and cooperative relationships within the organization and with organizations and persons to whom the organization provides services. Lines of communication should be open, and persons within the organization should be responsive to giving and receiving feedback. Feedback should not be seen as a personal attack, but as a means of helping the organization to move forward.

Flexibility and willingness to change should be hallmarks of the organization, so that the organization does not become obsolete, but can continue to respond effectively to the needs of those they serve. Fisheries organizations should be learning organizations – making appropriate use of new information and insights, as well as learning from experience. Each member of the organization should



understand the goals of their organization and they role that they play in the organization. Commitment to organizational goals can be built by ensuring that these are aligned with personal goals.

By repositioning the human being in the process of fisheries management, fisheries organizations may need to have a human resource manager on staff, who can help to ensure that: lines of communication remain open; persons have the opportunity to air their frustrations and have them addressed; and, collaborative relationships and goodwill are maintained and/or strengthened. It may also be necessary to consider having public relations officers, or some other mechanism of ensuring that feedback from the sector (the customers) is obtained in a timely and efficient manner, and that customer needs are met. Time spent empathizing with and understanding the needs of colleagues and co-workers should not be seen as time wasted away from work at the desk, but as an opportunity to built empathy, trust and improved collaborative relationships.

We are not suggesting that emotional intelligence take the place of technical knowledge and approach within organizations with responsibility for fisheries management, but that emotional intelligence be evaluated for the potential that it has to contribute to successful fisheries management, and that the concepts learned from a study of emotional intelligence be used where appropriate to enhance the outcome of our fisheries management efforts.

### **Emotional Intelligence and the Resource Users**

At least two areas need to be considered in this section: 1) The interaction between fisheries organizations and the resource user 2) The interactions among resource users.

Fisheries organizations (in particular government organizations) often play a lead role in what happens in the fisheries sector. Often an approach is taken where the Government organization behaves as if it knows everything, and it expects everyone to do what it says without discussion. Often the organization does not even take the time to properly explain the rationale behind the decisions that it takes. There is still a widespread feeling among resource users that government officers sit in their offices and make decisions without a thorough understanding of realities. That is, the resource users' experience and wisdom does not seem to count for much. Another telling comment is that people who do research with the fisheries sector often come to them for information, but they never know what happens to the information. Given this, it is not surprising that some persons appear reluctant to comply with regulations and to give certain information.

We are suggesting, that there is more room for developing common understandings between resource manager and resource user. There is also room for commitment building, negotiation, empathy and discussion. Fisheries organizations must be willing to respond to the needs and experiences of those that they serve. This must not only happen at the formal level, but must become a part of how individuals experience their interactions with other individuals. We are not necessarily suggesting that government organizations move away from their

decisions regarding particular issues, but rather that they spend more time listen and understanding, rather than directing. The success of the Soufriere Marine Management Area in St. Lucia (Figure 2) is indicative of the efficacy of such an approach.

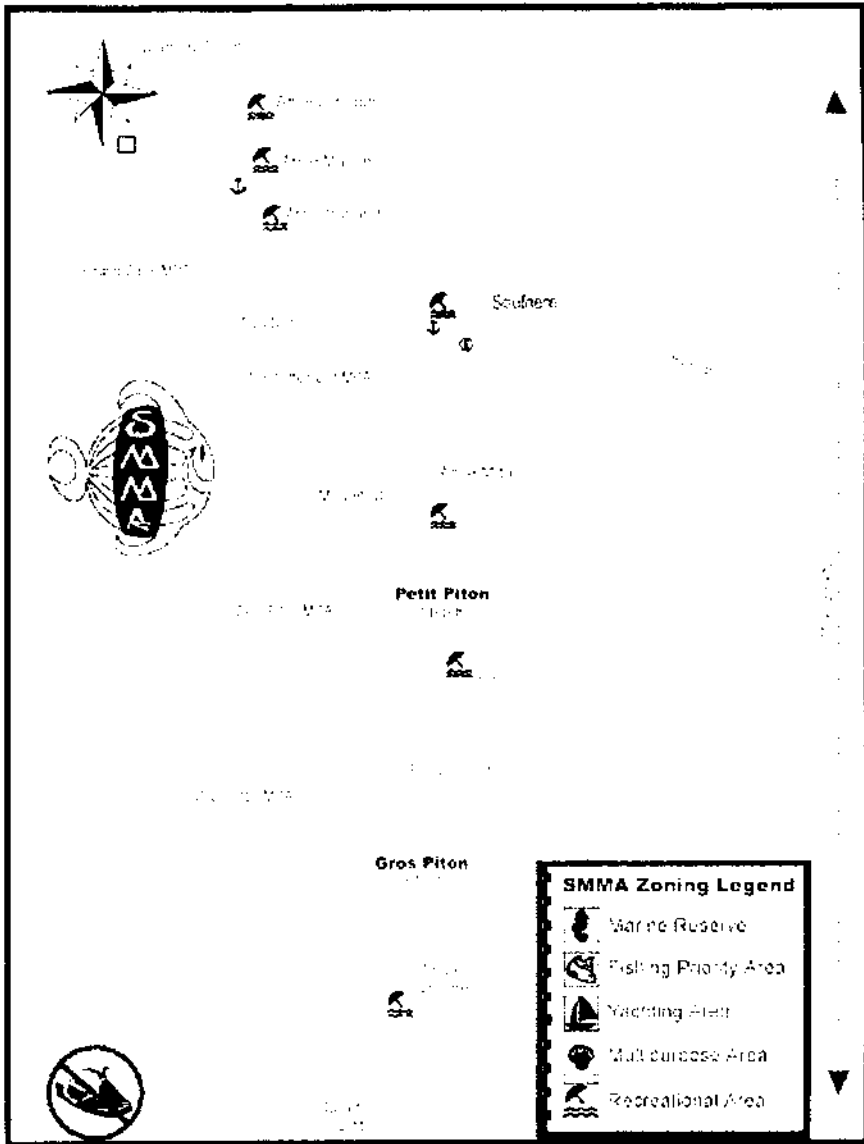


Figure 2. Soufriere Marine Management Area in Saint Lucia: fishers' knowledge and perspectives contributed in large measure to its sustainability.

Very few fisheries can be adequately managed without some level of collaboration between the resource manager and the resource user. McConney (2000, see also Berkes et al. 2001) identifies a spectrum of possibilities for power-sharing in fisheries, ranging from full community control to full government management. Within the Caribbean the trend is towards a more participatory form of management. Collaboration in these cases, has to be based on principles of transparency and accountability (Berkes et al. 2001). "As the conventional way of managing fisheries is gradually replaced by a new, more holistic and people-oriented way, there needs to be an emphasis on process. What makes the new management feasible is not a new formula that replaces the old, but putting into effect a new process of doing things" (*ibid.*). This new process, since it involves almost a "people first" orientation, must utilise an understanding of how people think and how we as managers can relate to them in a way that is supportive of our attempts to (invariably) change their behaviour. We must share with them a sort of "gut" appreciation for the things that drive them. As Carney (1998) put it: "we should listen to those with whom we are working and learn from them about their own objectives, their own understanding of what it means to be in and escape from poverty". To ensure that this takes place managers and resource users alike would be better served if they deal with each other based on accurate interpretations of emotions.

Emotional intelligence also has implications for how resource users relate to each other. In order to properly contribute to the process of fisheries management, resource users also need to come together to share information and clarify perspectives. Whether this occurs in the form of temporary interest groups, or as more well developed organizations, the same principles will apply. Group or organizations would benefit from the development of emotional competencies, as this will enable persons to interact and share diverse perspectives, with minimum conflict, bad feeling and frustration.

#### SUMMARY

If we could choose three things that we would want persons to implement after reading this paper they would be summarised as follows:

- i) People first.
- ii) Please may I listen to/empathise with you.
- iii) Let me help you listen to/ empathise with me.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we are not suggesting a cure-all for the maladies experienced in fisheries management. What we are offering is food for thought, and essentially an alternative approach. What we want to convey is that this approach can and does work. The evidence and explanations for emotional intelligence are based on scientific fact. An understanding of EI or the development of EI competencies,

allows us to add another set of tools to our tool kit. Like any other tool, use it where it helps and where it is most effectively applied.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Messrs. Keith Nichols, Valerie Isaac-St. Hill, and David Popo of the OECS Environment and Sustainable Development Unit for their review of an earlier draft of this contribution.

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