The growth of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been driven by some significant steps in our understanding of how the brain works. To understand and develop EI we must understand the neuroscience behind it.

Early models in psychology described human behaviour in terms of stimulus and response. However, advancements in psychology and neuroscience have shown that several stages fall in-between stimulus and response. That is, information is initially filtered through our attitudes before being processed as feelings, emotions and thoughts.

The response to this is our behaviour, from which there is an outcome. We summarise these stages using the acronym ‘safe-t’.

Science also shows that different regions of the brain facilitate Emotional Intelligence. These regions are broadly represented below.

These insights into the workings of the brain have profound implications for how to develop Emotional Intelligence. For example, people often know what they should do but do not put this into practice. One reason is that knowing about something lives in a different part of the brain (neocortex) from doing something (limbic region). The emotional or limbic brain learns through doing. Therefore, in order to turn good intentions into habits of behaviour an individual needs to put them into practice through rehearsal and physical experience.