Psychology of Emotion: Theory and Applications
Professor Dilwar Hussain
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati
Module 10, Lecture 25: Skills of EI- Self-Regulation/self-management

I welcome you to Module 10 of this course, which marks the final lecture of Module 10. We are delving into Part 1 of Emotional Intelligence in this module, and today's lecture is numbered 25 overall and is the third within Module 10. In today's lecture, we will focus on another skill of emotional intelligence: self-regulation or self-management. We are discussing each skill individually, and in the last lecture, we covered self-awareness. Today, our topic is self-regulation or self-management.

To provide a brief recap of our previous lecture, we explored the concept of self-awareness. We aimed to comprehend the various types of self-awareness, including internal and external self-awareness. Additionally, we examined the components of self-awareness, such as emotional awareness, self-confidence, and accurate self-assessment. Furthermore, we addressed blind spots in awareness, noting that research indicates only a few individuals possess genuine self-awareness. Various factors, including extensive experience, particularly in the workplace and higher positions, can impede self-awareness. We explored the reasons behind this phenomenon. Lastly, we discussed methods to enhance self-awareness, particularly through effective feedback systems and introspection. It's worth noting that introspection may not always result in increased self-awareness.

There are certain intricacies to consider regarding the types of questions we ask, as it also determines the success of self-awareness. These are some of the points we discussed in the last class. Today, we will delve into the concept of self-regulation or self-management. In this context, we will explore concepts related to self-regulation, such as delayed gratification and self-distancing. The concept of self-regulation or self-management has been previously introduced in another lecture. However, in this session, we will primarily discuss it within the context of emotional intelligence. While the earlier discussion was more general, today's lecture will focus on emotion regulation and emotional intelligence.

Self-regulation or self-management is one of the most crucial components of almost all theories of emotional intelligence. When discussing emotional intelligence, self-regulation is often one of the first aspects that come to mind. It involves the ability to regulate oneself and control the expression of emotions according to the context, making it one of the most visible aspects of emotional intelligence. Today, we will explore various aspects of this concept to gain a deeper understanding.

Self-management entails utilizing our comprehension of emotions to control and direct ourselves. It revolves around managing the expression and experience of emotions based on our understanding. The essence of self-management lies in regulating our emotions so that they do not dictate our actions. Individuals who struggle to regulate their emotions often find themselves being controlled by their emotions, leading their lives in accordance with those emotions rather than guiding them.

Emotion regulation is crucial as it allows you to take charge of your emotions and utilize them productively or appropriately in a given context. To achieve this, we must leverage our understanding of our emotions to govern our behaviour. Understanding emotions, which includes employing methods to regulate them, is vital. Today, we will discuss various strategies, some of which we have previously explored, and others we will delve into in today's lecture.

Identifying and preventing emotional triggers, which can lead to unconscious emotional expressions, is essential. Avoiding thought patterns that may result in emotional breakdowns is equally important. The ability to control one's thoughts is crucial because the consequences of not managing emotions are unfavourable. If emotions are left unregulated, one's quality of life may significantly decline, affecting social interactions and relationships. Therefore, emotional regulation has significant implications for life quality.

Individuals who fail to manage their emotions in the business world are often labelled as rageaholics or drama queens. Their inability to regulate emotions leads to negative reactions from others, who may avoid or distance themselves from such individuals. It's evident that if you cannot control yourself, you cannot effectively manage others. This is a critical point to consider, especially for leaders or influencers, as lack of self-control can diminish respect and trust.

Self-awareness precedes self-management. Without a thorough understanding of oneself, regulating emotions becomes challenging. Awareness of emotional patterns, triggers, and interpersonal dynamics is crucial. Managing negative emotions, such as anger, requires self-awareness, as it enables individuals to identify and understand their feelings, thereby reducing their impact.

For instance, if someone experiences fear before meeting an important client, acknowledging the emotion and its cause can help alleviate anxiety. Recognizing that the upcoming event is causing anxiety allows individuals to take steps to address it. Awareness and recognition of emotions are essential for effective regulation and management. Without this awareness, addressing emotional responses becomes difficult. Therefore, acknowledging and understanding emotions is a crucial step in managing them effectively.

Now, I know that feeling scared before an important event is common for me. This may be a general pattern of emotional expression. Therefore, when I sense fear, it reminds me that the meeting is significant. Understanding the signal of emotions is crucial. This acknowledgement is usually sufficient to remind myself that my fear is serving a purpose. Once I acknowledge and accept this pattern, the intensity of fear decreases, and I understand that it is serving a purpose. This self-awareness and understanding can enhance self-regulation. This is just an example of that.

Now, a few terms that are used interchangeably may have slight technical differences in understanding or defining them. One is delayed gratification, another is self-control, and self-regulation. These concepts are generally used interchangeably and inconsistently in the literature. Let's explore the differences in meaning of these terms.

Delayed gratification refers to one's ability to resist an impulse for immediate reward to receive a more favourable reward at a later time. It involves the ability to resist an immediate reward in favour of a potentially larger or more favourable reward in the future. This ability is crucial, as research suggests that highly successful individuals possess the ability to delay gratification. It's important for success in various life endeavours. Delayed gratification involves an element of self-control and self-management. It's about resisting immediate temptations for better long-term outcomes. This term is closely connected to self-regulation, which is a broader concept encompassing the idea of self-control.

So, self-regulation is a very broad term, with self-control being one aspect of it, and delayed gratification being a specific case of self-control. Self-control is just one construct that exists on the continuum of self-regulatory abilities. It is a particular category of self-regulation, which also includes impulse control, ego-resilience, and many other things. Delayed gratification is positioned between these two constructs on the continuum. In summary, delayed gratification is basically a specific case of self-control, which is a component of self-regulation.

Self-regulation is the broadest term encompassing various self-regulatory abilities. One of these abilities is self-control, and a specific example of self-control is delayed gratification. Delayed gratification is a specific case of self-control, which falls under the umbrella of self-regulation. Self-regulation is the broadest term, which includes many self-regulatory abilities, including self-control, and delayed gratification is one particular case of self-control, requiring control over immediate rewards to gain better rewards later.

Delayed gratification involves postponing an immediate reward for the sake of a more valuable reward in the future. It is a crucial aspect of self-regulation and exercising self-control, as it requires resisting immediate temptations. Most experimental tasks evaluating delayed gratification involve asking people to give up a smaller immediate reward in exchange for a larger reward later. This ability tends to increase as individuals grow older.

By the age of 4, children begin to develop some future-oriented thinking, and by age 5, they exhibit cognitive strategies necessary for delaying gratification. However, there are notable differences among individuals in their ability to delay gratification. This variation may stem from differences in cognitive skills related to delay, such as executive function, and differences in brain morphology and activation of regions like the prefrontal cortex, which support these abilities.

One of the most famous experiments on delayed gratification is the marshmallow test, conducted on children to examine the factors contributing to it. Psychologist Walter Mischel and his colleagues devised experimental scenarios known as the marshmallow test in the 1960s and early 1970s. In this test, children were presented with a choice between a smaller immediate reward and a larger reward they could receive later by waiting.

The marshmallow test demonstrated that children who exhibited better self-control by waiting longer during the test at age 4 displayed higher levels of social and academic success in later years. Similarly, experiments adapted for adolescents showed that those who could delay gratification achieved higher grades, exhibited fewer behavioural issues, and were less likely to engage in risky behaviours like smoking, drinking alcohol, or using drugs compared to those who couldn't delay gratification.

Delayed gratification predicts many positive outcomes in life because it reflects a sense of self-control and self-regulation. Researchers have identified two systems involved in decision-making processes, namely the hot and cool systems, to explain the mechanisms behind delayed gratification. By manipulating various aspects of situations, researchers have gained insights into the factors contributing to delayed gratification and individual differences in this ability.

In the thinking processes, these two systems determine different outcomes and can explain delay of gratification. The cool system is designed for complex thinking, understanding time, and remembering specific events; this system is referred to as the "no system." Essentially, when using the cool system in thought processes, one is engaging in complex thinking, attempting to understand various aspects of a situation, and remembering specific events. On the other hand, the hot system is specialized, especially when quickly processing emotions and reacting based on certain triggers. The hot system operates swiftly, primarily when reacting based on emotions and triggers, with minimal thinking involved. Whether triggers are unconditional or conditional, this system is referred to as the "go system." Essentially, when a trigger occurs, individuals immediately react.

According to Metcalfe and Mischel's research, these systems differ significantly. The hot system is emotional, immediate, reflexive, and develops early in childhood, often accentuated by stress. Conversely, the cool system is cognitive, involves more reflective thinking, operates more slowly, and generally develops later. It decreases under stress and is associated with more self-control, allowing individuals to judge situations and act accordingly. These two systems of thinking involve fast versus slow processing, simple versus complex processing.

In the context of delay of gratification, waiting becomes more challenging when children focus on the emotional or hot aspect of the reward. However, it becomes easier when they engage with the cool aspect of the situation, employing intellectual aspects and thoughtful processes. For example, children encouraged to think of a marshmallow reward as fluffy clouds are more successful in waiting, as they focus on intellectual aspects rather than just the emotional allure of the treat.

Delay of gratification is generally associated with the cool system; the more one utilizes this system, the more successful they are at delaying gratification. Conversely, the hot system makes delaying gratification more difficult. Children who excel at delaying gratification often employ strategies to divert their attention from the enticing aspects of immediate rewards. Over time, children improve their cooling strategies, and most adolescents can endure longer wait times compared to pre-schoolers.

Unfortunately, accessing the cool system or the ability to delay gratification becomes more challenging, especially when strongly required, such as during stressful situations. Stress negatively affects the capacity to delay gratification, leading individuals to succumb to urges even when it would be highly beneficial to exercise self-control, such as during the first semester of college.

So, the whole hot system comes into play under stress. In real life, it may not be easy to delay gratification, primarily because when it is necessary to control oneself and delay gratification, and if the situation is very stressful and under pressure, the hot system can come into play, making it more difficult to delay gratification. Furthermore, chronic stress during childhood hinders the development of this ability. Negative events in childhood, like chronic stress, can

hinder the ability to delay gratification even in adulthood. The impact of childhood experiences can persist into adulthood.

Some psychologists suggest that instead of viewing delay of gratification as a skill, psychologists like Block, Funder, and their colleagues propose that it is more about a person's level of ego control, which refers to their overall tendency to restrain impulses. It is not merely a specific skill but rather a person's ability to restrain their impulses, which can vary under different circumstances. On one end of the spectrum, there are individuals who lack control, being highly impulsive and lacking self-control in delaying gratification. On the other hand, there are individuals who exert too much self-control, excessively restraining themselves even when it's unnecessary.

Both extremes, under-control and over-control, are considered maladaptive. Under-controlled individuals struggle to pursue long-term goals, while over-controlled individuals may miss out on opportunities for pleasure and emotional expression. Finding a balance is crucial. Delay of gratification and control are essential but only to the extent necessary for productivity in one's life.

Can we improve our ability to delay gratification? Research shows that it is associated with many positive benefits, particularly success in life and reaching goals. Mitchell conducted further experiments and discovered that employing various distraction techniques aided children in effectively postponing gratification. However, delaying gratification is not straightforward in real-life situations; it can be very complex and challenging, unlike simple experimental settings.

In Mischel's study, children were promised secondary rewards after waiting for a short period, but everyday scenarios do not always guarantee such outcomes. In real life, even if you delay gratification, getting a better reward in the future is not guaranteed. The uncertainty surrounding this decision makes immediate rewards more appealing, adding to the challenges of delaying gratification. Achieving long-term goals or losing weight appears distant and uncertain, while the immediate pleasure of a treat right in front of you is definite.

The unpredictability of real-life circumstances adds to the difficulty of delaying gratification, as the timing of events in the real world is often uncertain and not easily predictable. Willingness to wait and delay gratification can be influenced by various factors, such as one's worldview, faith in their abilities to bring about desired outcomes, and the importance of the outcome for which they are delaying gratification. For example, a student studying hard may delay gratification if they have faith in their ability to achieve good results.

So, faith in oneself is very important. Another crucial factor is trusting that your goals will eventually be realized. Your trust in the goal's attainment is vital. If you possess these factors, your ability in terms of self-regulation will be much better compared to if you don't have them. So, your faith in your ability to bring about the rewards for which you are sacrificing something, and your trust that the goal will be reached, are very important.

If you have these qualities, you can sacrifice smaller things now to achieve your goals later. In a more recent experiment by Russian Mischal, Kidd and Kulik in 2003, they explored the concept of trust and its influence on delay of gratification. The experiment followed a similar structure to earlier ones, but in half of the cases, the researchers deliberately broke their promise of providing a second treat, offering only an apology instead.

In these cases, they changed the structure of the experiment, breaking the promise of providing a better reward in half of the cases. So, for half of the participants, they did not fulfil the promise, thereby breaking trust, while for the other half, they did fulfil it. They then observed how this impacted delay of gratification.

During subsequent runs of the experiment, the majority of the children who had received a promised treat in the initial experiment once again exhibited the ability to delay gratification. However, the children who had been deceived during the first round of the experiment, where they were promised a better reward but did not receive it, immediately consumed the marshmallow given as soon as the researcher left the room, without waiting for a better reward later. This shows that trust plays a crucial role in delay of gratification.

Furthermore, providing feedback regarding the anticipated wait time can also make delay of gratification easier. Having clear feedback about how long you need to wait for a result can make delaying gratification easier compared to when you don't know when the result will come, as uncertainty creates problems in delaying gratification.

Another concept connected to self-regulation is called self-distancing. Self-distancing involves adopting a perspective that is detached and removed from one's immediate subjective experience. It's a cognitive strategy that allows individuals to create psychological distance between themselves and their thoughts, emotions, and experiences.

This perspective shift helps individuals gain a broader and balanced understanding of their emotions and experiences, which improves self-regulation, coping strategies, and self-control. Psychologists have recognized the advantage of creating psychological distance for self-regulation, as it has been found to enhance emotion regulation and is considered a fundamental factor enabling self-control.

Observing thoughts from a more detached perspective is one of the main aspects of mindfulness, which is considered beneficial for mental and physical health. Self-distancing and mindfulness share conceptual similarities and contribute to various positive changes in mental and physical health. Creating a self-distanced perspective is vital for self-regulation, as it allows individuals to observe their thoughts and emotions objectively, rather than becoming immersed in them.

So, in the self-immersed perspective, there is no distance, so the self becomes fully emerged in the experience. The experience and the self are seen as the same thing, resulting in complete immersion in one's subjective experiences. This perspective involves being closely identified with the immersed thoughts and emotions, without any sense of distance. Individuals deeply engage with and personally invest in the experience, often perceiving them as directly happening to them.

For instance, if someone receives a rejection email after applying for a job and is deeply self-immersed, they may feel devastated and continuously question themselves, leading to self-doubt and prolonged distress. They become completely consumed by the negative emotions aroused, merging with them in the self-immersed perspective.

In contrast, in a self-distanced perspective, individuals have a sense of objectivity. They can view their thoughts and emotions more objectively without becoming overwhelmed or too

closely identified with them. Creating psychological distance enables individuals to evaluate experiences more rationally, make better decisions, and regulate their emotions more effectively.

For example, if someone takes a self-distanced perspective on receiving a job rejection, they would shift their focus away from personalizing the rejection and instead adopt a more objective view. Instead of dwelling on why they were rejected, they might say, "Why is John upset?" By using their name or referring to themselves in the third person, they create a sense of distance and objectivity, allowing them to see the situation more objectively.

Self-distancing strategies, such as visual imagery and linguistic shifts, help individuals separate themselves from immediate emotions and gain a broader perspective. By employing techniques like visualizing oneself from an external observer's standpoint or using third-person pronouns, individuals can distance themselves psychologically and gain insights from a more objective standpoint.

Utilizing linguistic shifts, such as referring to oneself by name or using non-first person pronouns during introspection, can serve as effective self-distancing techniques. By creating this psychological distance, individuals can adopt a more objective perspective, allowing them to better understand their thoughts and emotions as if observing someone else's inner life.

So, this can be very helpful when you are in the midst of experiences where visualization may not be easy. So when something is happening now, then visualization and closing eyes may not work; this linguistic trick can work when you are in the midst of an experience. The last one is the mental time travel. It basically talks about the ability to mentally transport oneself into the past or future. By mentally distancing oneself from the present moment, individuals can reflect on their experiences from a temporal distance. So, in visual imagery, you are just in the present, creating a distance and kind of visualizing yourself and looking at yourself from a distance perspective. In mental time travel, you are moving ahead or back, transporting yourself in time and looking at your life. For example, when analysing negative experiences, a person can imagine themselves in the future. So, let's say something negative has happened now. You imagine yourself, let's say, one week later or one month later, how you look at this incident that is happening now, or whatever negative experiences that you are going through. Look at it from, let's say, after one month, how it will be, will it remain the same or something will change.

So, from a distance, you create a mental time travel and see it from a future perspective. Then generally what happens, this is all life experience, there, with the passage of time, things heal. Whatever we are so much concerned about now, after one week, it may not even be remembered, but now everything is consuming you. But after one week, you completely forget about it. So, if you look at things, whatever is happening now, especially the negative things, from a mental time travel perspective, from the future, let's say after one week, one month, or one year, whatever it is, you see what will happen to this. You will find, you know, you will not have any consequence, so in that sense, it will create a distance and one will be able to gain wisdom and understanding from the passage of time, which takes time, but immediately you can create that understanding by mentally traveling to the future. So, here the focus is on the future self as the passage of time improves the way we feel about negative experiences. So, this temporal distance can be done by asking people to think about how they might feel about a current stressor either one week from now, near future, or maybe ten years, or whatever far

distance, one year, one week after or one, maybe after one year, or something, whatever works for one person, one can create that mental time travel and then find, obviously, it will not have any significance after one week or after one year, whatever it is. So, the passage of time, things kind of heals everything so it will give you some distance to understand the problems of the present and you will not be immersed in it, rather than you will understand the kind of broader perspective of the situation.

So, Kross and Ayduk proposed that mental time travel helps self-regulation because of impermanence focus. Everything changes, nothing remains, whatever we are now concerned and kind of consumed by something in the present moment, it will not have any meaning after one week or after one month. So, everything is impermanent so that focus becomes, that impermanence comes into the focus and we understand it so the impact of the present situation reduces. So, thinking about how our future selves will feel about our current troubles can help us recover emotionally faster by making us more aware that our thoughts and feelings about stressors will fade as time goes on. So, research evidence also indicates that impermanence focus most likely is the mechanism behind the success of mental time travel. So, mental time travel can work, one of the reasons is that if this whole impermanence focus kind of is successfully created an impact in terms of distancing oneself and reducing the impact of the event itself.

So, these are some of the things about self-regulation and some of the specific techniques and details we have discussed. So, with this, I will stop here. Thank you.