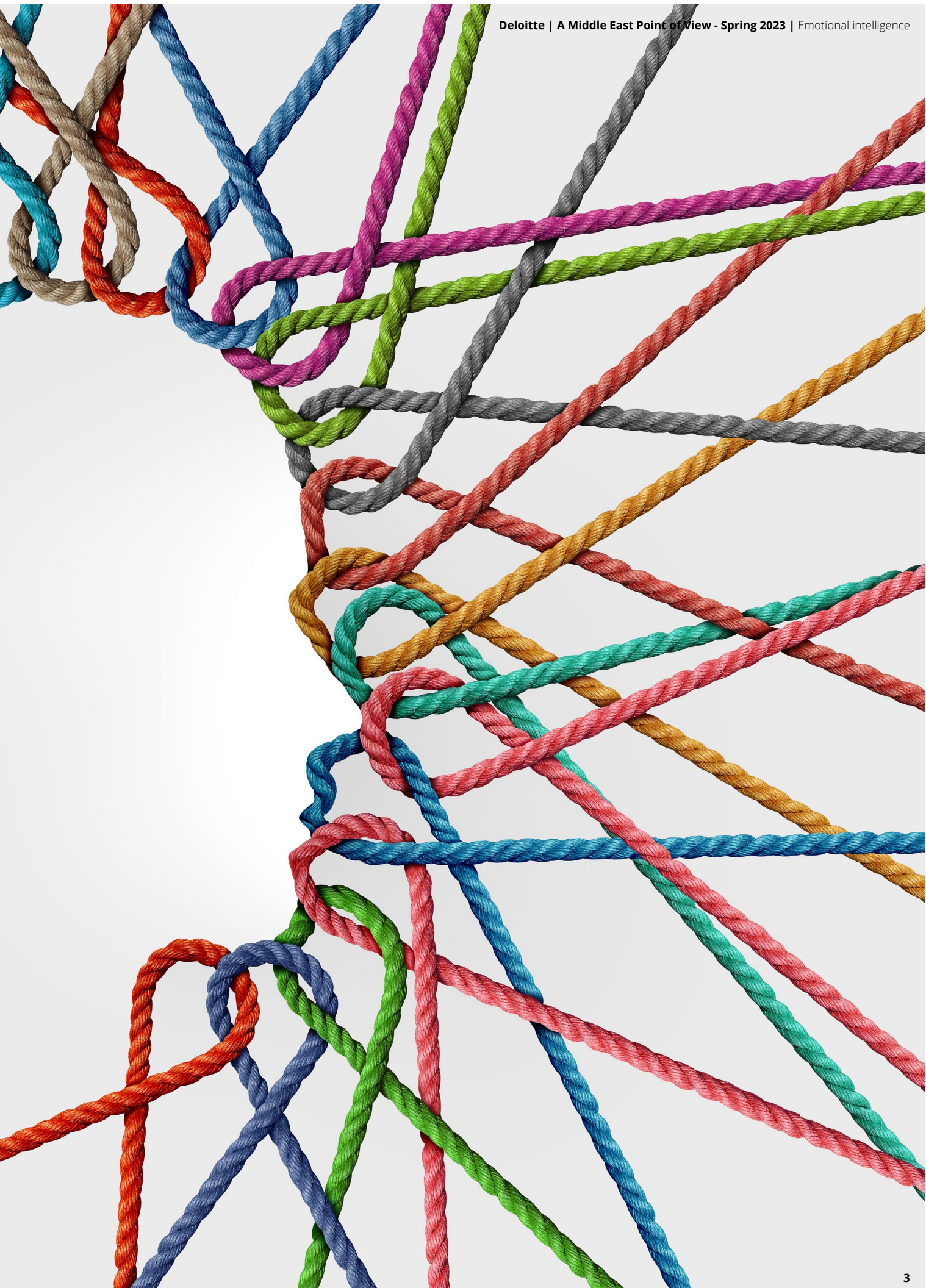# The power of emotional intelligence in a tech-savvy world

As we commemorate and reflect upon International Women's Day 2023, we choose to remember history speckled with important contributions from women all over the world, as well as look ahead to the future of technology and the critical role emotional intelligence (EQ), a metric traditionally viewed as "feminine," will play.

We sometimes forget that although there is an approximate 20% female representation in information technology fields nowadays, this was not always the case. Women coders made up the majority of the US and UK computing workforces in the 50s and 60s. In these early days of computer technology, these women worked as "human" computers, but also made strides in the development of the mainframe computer and programming languages. One such example is Grace Hopper, a pioneer and leader in the field of computer science, who in 1949 was one of the programmers of the Harvard Mark I.

An interesting fact: Grace Hopper is credited with popularizing the now common phrase "debugging" in the IT world when a moth literally got trapped in her Harvard Mark 1 computer!

Hopper was known for her groundbreaking work in computer programming and her advocacy for the development of user-friendly programming languages. Her work led to the development of COBOL (Common Business Oriented Language), a high-level programming language which is still widely used in business and finance applications today.

As they say, history allows us to learn from the lived experiences of our predecessors. We also embarked on our technology related careers years later. Having spent the formative years of our careers at Deloitte, we have had the opportunity to work with some of the most talented and inspiring men and women leaders in the industry. Throughout our experience, we have noted that the one common secret ingredient (or maybe not so secret, but

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essential nonetheless) that ties the most successful of the leaders together is the high levels of emotional intelligence (EQ) demonstrated with both colleagues and clients. This empathetic leadership style is often overlooked in traditional leadership models; however, it is a crucial component of building a successful and inclusive workplace.

EQ refers to the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and those of others. Studies have shown that teams with higher levels of empathy are more productive and creative than those who lack it. When team members feel that their leaders are invested in their well-being and success, they are more likely to go above and beyond in their roles, take on new challenges, and come up with innovative solutions to complex problems.

Demonstrating high EQ is not always easy, especially in fast-paced and competitive industries like the professional services industry. It requires time to put ourselves in our colleagues' and clients' shoes and understand their perspectives and challenges. However, the benefits of empathetic leadership are clearly worth the effort with proven outcomes including:

· **Improved communication:** Leaders with high EQ are better able to communicate with their teams in a way that resonates with them. They can tailor their communication style to the individual needs of team members and provide feedback in a way that is constructive and supportive.

· **Better decision-making:** Leaders with high EQ are better able to manage their emotions and remain calm under pressure. This allows them to make better decisions that are not driven by fear, anger, or other negative emotions.

· **Stronger relationships**: Leaders with high EQ are skilled at building strong relationships with their team members, based on mutual respect and trust. This creates a more positive work environment and can lead to increased collaboration and productivity.

· **Improved conflict resolution:** Leaders with high EQ are skilled at managing conflict and finding solutions that work for everyone. They are able to listen to and understand the perspectives of all parties involved and find common ground.

· **Increased empathy:** Leaders with high EQ are able to put themselves in their team members' shoes and understand their perspectives and needs. This leads to greater empathy and understanding, which can create a more positive and supportive work environment.

· **Higher engagement:** When team members feel valued and understood, they are more likely to be engaged in their work. Leaders with high EQ can create a work environment that fosters engagement and motivation, which can lead to improved performance and productivity. ⟩

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But does the role of EQ stop at leadership styles and people management? Arguably, EQ extends to all areas of technological development. For example, the application of artificial intelligence (AI) continues to develop at an exponential pace, with the future pointing to a day when it will be embedded in all aspects of life. One of the most pressing concerns surrounding AI is the potential for bias. Bias in AI can have serious consequences, from perpetuating discrimination to making inaccurate predictions. This skill is critical in preventing bias in AI since it can help developers and data scientists recognize and address their own biases as they build and train AI algorithms.

Here are some ways that EQ can help prevent bias in AI:

· **Recognizing personal biases:** AI is only as unbiased as the data used to train it. Data scientists and developers must be aware of their own biases and work to mitigate them when selecting and preparing data for AI algorithms. EQ can help individuals recognize their own biases and understand how they may be impacting the AI system.

· **Building diverse teams:** Diversity and inclusion are critical in preventing bias in AI. EQ can help leaders build diverse teams that are better equipped to recognize and address potential biases.

· **Engaging with stakeholders:** AI systems are designed to serve specific purposes and populations. EQ can help data scientists and developers engage with stakeholders, including users and subject matter experts, to understand their needs and ensure that the AI system is serving them fairly and accurately.

· **Testing for bias:** EQ can help data scientists and developers design tests that detect and correct bias in AI systems. This requires an understanding of how different groups may be impacted by the system and a willingness to address any issues that arise.

· **Ongoing monitoring and maintenance:** EQ can help leaders and developers recognize when biases may be emerging in an AI system and take steps to correct them. This requires ongoing monitoring and maintenance of the system, as well as a commitment to continuous improvement.

In summary, EQ can have a powerful impact on an organization's measurable success, and it will continue to serve a critical role in ensuring diversity and preventing bias in technology moving forward. As AI continues to advance and become more integrated into our daily lives, it is imperative to prioritize EQ to ensure that these systems are serving us well.

Clearly, we did not personally know Grace Hopper to say for certain that she was an empathetic leader with high levels of emotional intelligence; however, based on what has been written about her legacy, she was known to be a visionary leader who believed in the power of collaboration and teamwork. She worked to develop user-friendly programming languages that could be easily understood and used by non-technical users, which suggests that she was interested in making technology more accessible and inclusive. She was known for advocating for the participation of women in computing and encouraging their career development in the field, which indicates a level of empathy and concern for the well-being of others. It's probably safe to say that her leadership style, in a technical results-oriented field in the 1950s, reflected the high levels of EQ to which we should all - men and women – aspire to. ●

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