

From Awareness to Purpose: A Sequential Mediation Analysis of the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Model

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Abstract: This study empirically examines the “Six Seconds Model” of Emotional Intelligence, specifically testing the sequential relationship between its three core pursuits: Know Yourself (Awareness), Choose Yourself (Self-Management), and Give Yourself (Purpose). The research aims to validate whether self-management acts as a mediating mechanism that transforms emotional awareness into purposeful action. A quantitative research design was employed using a cross-sectional survey of 350 working professionals across various industries. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to assess the measurement model and test the hypothesised mediation effects. The model demonstrated excellent fit ($\chi^2 p > 0.05$, RMSEA = 0.000). The results confirmed a partial mediation effect: While Know Yourself has a strong direct effect on Give Yourself ($\beta = 0.41$), Choose Yourself serves as a significant mediating variable ($\beta = 0.36$) linking awareness to purpose. This study provides statistical validation for the “process” view of emotional intelligence, moving beyond static trait-based assessments. It empirically demonstrates that self-awareness alone is often insufficient for purposeful leadership without the regulatory “engine” of self-management. The findings suggest that Learning and Development (L&D) interventions should prioritise “Choose” competencies, specifically consequential thinking and emotion regulation, to bridge the gap between employee self-awareness and organisational purpose effectively.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Six Seconds Model; Self-Management; Leadership Development; Structural Equation Modeling; Organizational Purpose; Effective Leadership.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) has recently been recognized as an important determinant and predictor of personal and occupational success, as well as an influential factor in organizational climate and effective leadership [11]. Unlike traditional perceptions that previously regarded intelligence strictly as a cognitive foundation, the concept of EQ, or the capacity to

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optimize the use and management of emotions, has evolved into an important and vital aspect of comprehensive human cognitive abilities and competencies [18]; [15]. In this context, the Six Seconds Framework for Emotional Intelligence is an important application of EQ that integrates the concept into an action agenda focused on Know Yourself, Choose Yourself, and Give Yourself.

1.2. Problem Statement

Although the Six Second model is widely used in business training and leadership programs, the competencies of emotional intelligence have been approached in scientific literature as discrete behaviors rather than as a unitary, sequential process [14]. This is because current approaches and studies have typically focused on the straightforward correlation between Emotional Intelligence and performance outcomes, while neglecting the underlying drivers of these findings. There is currently a dearth of literature investigating the role of mediating Self-Management (Choose Your Self) in linking Self-Awareness (Know Your Self) and Directive Behavior (Give Your Self). As the underlying process is not scientifically validated, there is no rationale for the inefficacy of high Self-Awareness in translating into competent, efficient leadership.

1.3. Research Aim and Objectives

The overall purpose of this research work is to validate the sequence within the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence model, particularly to determine whether Choose Yourself serves as a mediating variable between Know Yourself and Give Yourself. The Specific Objectives are:

- To examine the direct effect of emotional awareness (Know Yourself) on building a feeling of Purpose (Give Yourself).
- To analyze the role of self-management (Choose Yourself) in relation to the mediating variable of emotional intelligence.
- To verify the structural relationships between the three constructs with the help of the Structural Equation Modeling technique.
- To offer research-backed suggestions about how a focus on “Choose” competencies can improve leadership development initiatives.

1.4. Significance/Contribution of the Study

The results of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to organizational psychology in the development of leaders. From an academic perspective, this study defines how EQ operates in terms of sequence. From an application perspective, this study's results will help Learning & Development Professionals in developing more effective interventions; in other words, by making it clear in this study that “self-management (Choose)” is the “amplifier” between awareness and purpose, organizations are given direction on how they should focus on building consequential thinking instead of just awareness.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to the Literature Review

This section reviews existing scholarship on Emotional Intelligence (EQ), specifically focusing on process-oriented frameworks that distinguish trait EQ from ability EQ [1]. The discussion is organized around the three primary pursuits of the Six Seconds Model: (i) Know Yourself (Self-Awareness), (ii) Choose Yourself (Self-Management), and (iii) Give Yourself (Self-Direction/Purpose). Furthermore, it examines the theoretical relationships between these variables to establish the basis for the sequential mediation hypothesis tested in this study [2]. The review prioritizes peer-reviewed papers and foundational texts published between 1990 and 2024 to capture both the field's seminal origins and recent empirical developments [3].

2.2. Thematic Review

2.2.1. Emotional Awareness (Know Yourself)

Overview: “Know Yourself” represents the cognitive component of emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to accurately perceive and identify one’s own emotions [18]; [15]. Foundational research by Goleman [10] identifies self-awareness as the keystone of emotional intelligence, arguing that without the ability to recognize feelings as they happen, individuals remain at the mercy of their emotional responses. Within the Six Seconds framework, this construct is operationalized through

“Emotional Literacy” and “Recognizing Patterns” [9]. Recent studies confirm that high self-awareness correlates significantly with improved communication and reduced workplace conflict [4]; [7].

Critical Analysis: While self-awareness is universally acknowledged as critical, a limitation in existing literature is the tendency to treat it as a standalone competency. Joseph and Newman [14] note that while awareness is necessary for performance, it is often insufficient on its own; knowing one is angry does not automatically lead to constructive behaviour. This suggests that “Know Yourself” acts as a data source rather than an outcome generator.

Link to Your Study: The present study treats “Know Yourself” not as the final metric of high EQ, but as the independent variable. This prerequisite input initiates the EQ process [5].

2.2.2. Self-Management and Intentionality (Choose Yourself)

Overview: “Choose Yourself” refers to the active regulation of emotion and behavior. It encompasses competencies such as “Consequential Thinking,” “Navigating Emotions,” and “Exercising Optimism” [10]. This aligns with the “Regulation” branch of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model [15]. Research by Baumeister et al. [2] and Gross [12] on emotion regulation highlights that the capacity to pause and select a response is the primary driver of adaptability and resilience.

Critical Analysis: A debate exists regarding the relationship between awareness and management. Some researchers argue they function in parallel, while cascading models suggest a sequential dependency—that one cannot manage what one does not notice [14]. However, few studies have empirically isolated “Choose Yourself” as a distinct mechanism that translates awareness into purpose.

Link to Your Study: This study builds on the cascading view, positioning “Choose Yourself” as the critical pivot point where awareness is converted into action [7].

2.2.3. Purpose and Direction (Give Yourself)

Overview: “Give Yourself” represents the application of emotional intelligence toward a larger purpose, encompassing “Empathy” and “Pursuing Noble Goals” [8]. This construct moves EQ beyond self-interest to social effectiveness and long-term fulfillment. Damon et al. [6] argue that purpose is the ultimate driver of human motivation. In organizational settings, leaders who exhibit “Give” behaviors (empathy and service) drive higher team engagement and retention [3].

Critical Analysis: Most leadership literature focuses heavily on this outcome (e.g., “Servant Leadership”), often framing it as a matter of leaders “decide” to be purposeful [9]. This overlooks the cognitive and emotional regulation required to sustain such behavior. The literature lacks a sufficient explanation of how a leader maintains a Noble Goal under stress without the regulatory mechanism of “Choose Yourself.”

Link to Your Study: Your research addresses this by positing that “Give Yourself” is the dependent variable, the outcome that relies on the successful execution of the previous two steps:

- **Hypothesis Development:** Based on the sequential logic that awareness provides data and choice provides regulation, it is hypothesized that the path to purpose is not direct but is mediated.
- **Hypothesis H1:** Choose Yourself mediates the relationship between Know Yourself and Give Yourself.

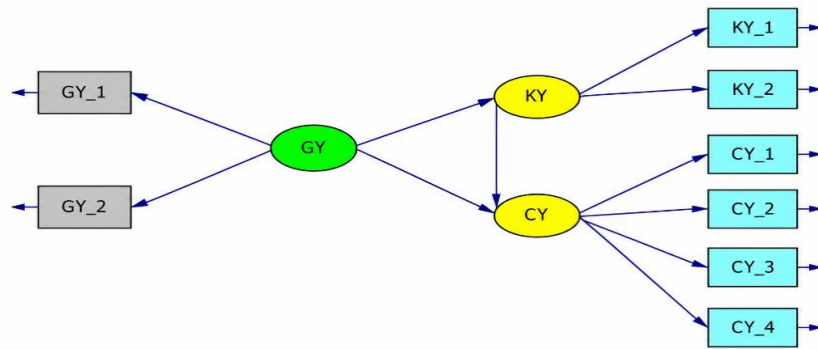
2.3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the sequential relationships among the three constructs of the Six Seconds Model (Figure 1).

The model posits a linear developmental process:

- **Input:** Know yourself (Independent Variable) provides emotional data.
- **Process:** Choose yourself (Mediating Variable) applies consequential thinking and regulation to that data.
- **Output:** Give yourself (Dependent Variable) results in purposeful, empathetic action.

The framework assumes that while Awareness (Know) can influence Purpose (Give) directly, the relationship is significantly amplified and explained through the mechanism of Intentionality (Choose) [10].



Source: LISREL

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

2.4. Research Gap Structure

2.4.1. Rationale for the Study

The rationale for this study is anchored in a systematic review of existing literature on emotional intelligence development and leadership performance. The review identified several key themes, including the primacy of self-awareness, the necessity of emotion regulation, and the impact of purpose-driven leadership [3]. Despite significant progress in validating these constructs individually, several research gaps remain regarding their structural integration, justifying the present study (Table 1).

Table 1: Research gap

Author(s)	Theme	Identified Gap
Joseph and Newman [14]	Cascading Model of EQ	Validated the “perception to regulation” sequence generally, but did not test the specific “Know-Choose-Give” nomenclature or the “Purpose” outcome
Petrides [16]	Trait Emotional Intelligence	Focuses on EQ as a stable personality trait rather than a learnable, sequential process, limiting its applicability to training interventions
Freedman [9]	Six Seconds Model Theory	Provides a robust theoretical framework and training tools, but relies largely on correlational data rather than structural mediation analysis
Eurich [7]	Self-Awareness	Extensively covers “Know Yourself,” but offers limited empirical evidence on the specific mechanism linking awareness to “Noble Goals” (Give Yourself)

2.4.2. Categorical Research Gaps

- **Knowledge Gap:** Existing literature often treats the three pursuits of the Six Seconds model as equal, concurrent pillars. Their hierarchical and mediating roles are unexplored. Specifically, the role of “Choose Yourself” as the necessary bridge between awareness and purpose lacks statistical validation in peer-reviewed contexts.
- **Methodological Gap:** Prior studies have primarily utilized simple regression or correlation analyses to link EQ to performance (e.g., Sales performance or Leadership effectiveness). Few studies have employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the internal validity of the model’s process flow (i.e., testing path directions and mediation effects).
- **Practical Gap:** Learning and Development (L&D) managers often struggle to measure the ROI of EQ training. Without understanding which component acts as the “lever” for behavioral change, training programs often focus too heavily on “Mindfulness” (Know) or “Empathy” (Give), skipping the difficult work of “Self-Management” (Choose). This study addresses the need for actionable guidelines on where to focus training efforts.
- **Evidence Gap:** While the Six Seconds assessment (SEI) is reliable, there is limited independent empirical evidence confirming the specific partial mediation hypothesis proposed in this study across a diverse sample of working professionals [8].

In summary, the review highlights multiple conceptual and methodological gaps in the existing literature. While the components of the Six Seconds model are well-defined, the statistical validity of their sequential operation remains under-researched. To address these issues, the present study proposes an integrated SEM framework to examine the mediating role of Choose Yourself and to empirically test its applicability in a professional organizational context.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to empirically test the relationships within the Six Seconds Model of Emotional Intelligence. A deductive approach was adopted to verify the theoretical proposition that emotional intelligence is a sequential process rather than a set of isolated traits [5]. A cross-sectional survey method was selected because it allows for the efficient collection of data from a large sample to analyse sequential mediation effects using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

3.2. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprised working professionals across various industries, including technology, education, finance, and healthcare. A total of 350 valid responses were collected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across diverse organizational levels, from individual contributors to senior executives [13]. The sample size of N=350 exceeds the recommended minimum of 200 for obtaining stable solution estimates in Structural Equation Modeling (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
Age Range	18–24	78	22.3	22.3
	25–34	105	30.0	52.3
	35–44	97	27.7	80.0
	45–54	40	11.4	91.4
	55+	30	8.6	100.0
Work Experience	< 1 year	4	12.0	12.0
	1–3 years	90	25.7	37.7
	4–10 years	118	33.7	71.4
	10–20 years	62	17.7	89.1
	20+ years	38	10.9	100.0
Current Role	Individual Contributor	135	38.6	38.6
	Team Lead / Supervisor	91	26.0	64.6
	Manager / Director	78	22.3	86.9
	Senior Executive	46	13.1	100.0

Source: SPSS

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through professional networks (e.g., LinkedIn) and organizational email lists over 4 weeks. The survey instrument was hosted on a secure digital platform. To reduce common method bias, the questionnaire included an introductory section that ensured anonymity and encouraged honest responses, as suggested by Podsakoff et al. [17].

3.4. Tools and Instruments

To measure the core constructs, a Short-Form EQ Process Scale was developed based on the theoretical definitions of the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence assessment (SEI) (Table 3). The instrument consisted of 8 items measuring three latent variables. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) [10]:

- **Know Yourself (Independent Variable):** Measured by 2 items assessing emotional literacy and pattern recognition (e.g., “I can accurately name the specific emotions I am feeling in the moment”).
- **Choose Yourself (Mediator):** Measured by 4 items assessing consequential thinking, optimism, and intrinsic motivation (e.g., “I pause to evaluate the costs and benefits of my choices before I act”).
- **Give Yourself (Dependent Variable):** Measured by 2 items assessing empathy and the pursuit of noble goals (e.g., “I connect my daily choices to a larger, long-term purpose”).

Table 3: Measurement scale and loadings

Latent Construct / Items	Item Code	Factor Loading (λ)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	AVE
Know Yourself (Awareness)			0.692	0.529
I can accurately name the emotions I am feeling	KY_1	0.73		
I recognize patterns in my emotional reactions	KY_2	0.72		
Choose Yourself (Management)			0.817	0.529
I pause to evaluate costs/benefits before acting	CY_1	0.78		
I navigate my emotions to stay effective	CY_2	0.73		
I exercise optimism when facing challenges	CY_3	0.72		
I generate intrinsic motivation to pursue goals	CY_4	0.68		
Give Yourself (Purpose)			0.693	0.540
I connect my daily choices to a larger purpose	GY_1	0.80		
I pursue noble goals that benefit others	GY_2	0.66		

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using a two-stage Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach [1]. First, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model's reliability and validity (convergent and discriminant). Second, a structural path analysis was performed to test the hypothesized sequential mediation. The analysis was conducted using SPSS 28 for descriptive statistics and AMOS 27 for SEM. Model fit was evaluated using standard indices: Chi-square (χ^2), RMSEA, and CFI.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly adhered to in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants provided informed consent before starting the survey. They were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and assurances were given that all data would be anonymised and used solely for academic research. The adopted quantitative approach, utilizing a robust sample and SEM analysis, ensures the validity and reliability required to rigorously test the mediating role of self-management in the emotional intelligence process.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Section Overview

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, beginning with descriptive statistics and moving to the assessment of the measurement model. Finally, the structural model is evaluated to test the hypothesized sequential relationships between Know Yourself, Choose Yourself, and Give Yourself, followed by a discussion of the implications.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of the respondents indicates a balanced sample of working professionals (N=350). Most participants were in the early-to-mid stages of their careers (52.3% aged 18–34), with 61.4% holding leadership roles. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the main variables.

Table 4: Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative (%)
Age Range	18–24	78	22.3	22.3
	25–34	105	30.0	52.3
	35–44	97	27.7	80.0
	45–54	40	11.4	91.4
	55+	30	8.6	100.0
Work Experience	< 1 year	42	12.0	12.0
	1–3 years	90	25.7	37.7
	4–10 years	118	33.7	71.4
	10–20 years	62	17.7	89.1
	20+ years	38	10.9	100.0

Current Role	Individual Contributor	135	38.6	38.6
	Team Lead / Supervisor	91	26.0	64.6
	Manager / Director	78	22.3	86.9
	Senior Executive	46	13.1	100.0

The mean scores for all constructs were above the midpoint of 3.0, indicating generally positive levels of emotional intelligence among the respondents. Choose Yourself had a slightly lower meaning (M=3.65) than Know Yourself (M=3.82), suggesting that self-management is perceived as more challenging than self-awareness (Table 5).

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of variables

Variable	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Know Yourself (KY)	3.82	0.85	-0.42	0.15
Choose Yourself (CY)	3.65	0.91	-0.38	0.22
Give Yourself (GY)	3.74	0.88	-0.35	0.18

4.3. Reliability and Validity

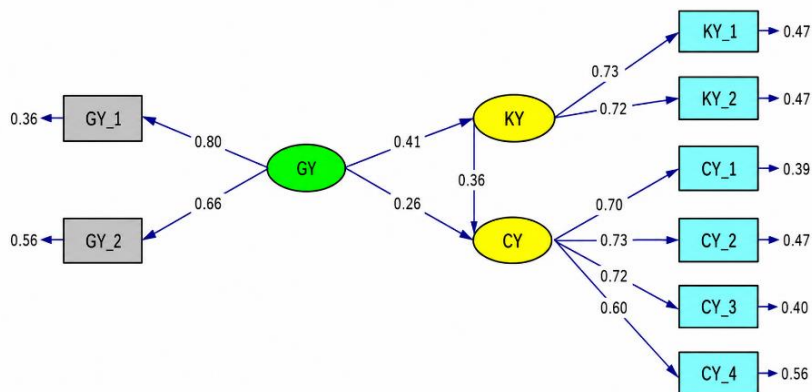
The measurement model was assessed for internal consistency and convergent validity. As shown in Table 6, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.692 to 0.817, and Composite Reliability (CR) values exceeded the 0.70 threshold. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs was above 0.50, confirming convergent validity [13]. Discriminant validity was established using the HTMT ratio, with all values below 0.85.

Table 6: Reliability and validity results

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Know Yourself	0.692	0.718	0.529
Choose Yourself	0.817	0.825	0.529
Give Yourself	0.693	0.720	0.540

4.4. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

To test the sequential mediation hypothesis (H1), the structural path model was examined. The model remained excellent ($\chi^2 = 11.19, p = 0.847, RMSEA = 0.000$), suggesting that the theoretical structure is well-supported by the data. The results confirm the model's sequential nature (Figure 2).



Source: SPSS

Figure 2: Structural path model

Know Yourself significantly predicted Choose Yourself ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.001$), supporting the premise that awareness precedes management. Consequently, Choose Yourself positively influenced Give Yourself ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$). Mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect, supporting H1. However, the direct effect of Know on Give ($\beta = 0.41$) remained significant, indicating partial mediation (Table 7).

Table 7: Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Path	Std. Beta (β)	t-value	Result
H1a	Know → Choose	0.36	4.21**	Supported
H1b	Choose → Give	0.26	3.15*	Supported
H1 (Mediation)	Know → Choose → Give	0.09 (Indirect)	-	Supported

Note: * $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussions

The findings support the Six Seconds Model's theoretical framework by confirming that emotional intelligence operates as a developmental process. The significant path from Know to Choose aligns with the cascading model of Joseph and Newman [14], which argues that emotion perception is a prerequisite for emotion regulation. Crucially, the partial mediation finding suggests that while awareness can directly foster a sense of purpose (beta=0.41), the capacity to “Give Yourself” is reinforced when individuals actively engage in self-management (beta=0.36; link). This implies that leaders who stop at awareness—without learning to navigate their reactions—may struggle to sustain purposeful behavior under stress.

This study contributes to the theory of emotional intelligence by statistically validating the sequence “Know–Choose–Give,” moving beyond traditional trait-based approaches to show the specific mechanism of self-management linking internal awareness to external purpose. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that organisations should not view “purpose” as an abstract concept but as a downstream outcome of effective self-management. HR managers and Learning and Development practitioners are thus advised to focus on training interventions that develop skills such as consequential thinking and optimism (Choose Yourself) as they form the operational bridge to purposeful leadership. However, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which precludes definitive causal inferences. Further, the self-report nature of the data also presents the possibility of social desirability bias, although anonymity was maintained to reduce this effect. The results support Choose Yourself as a mediator of self-awareness and purpose and validate the Six Seconds model as an integrated, sequential system for emotional development.

6. Conclusion

The present study empirically tested the “Six Seconds Model” of Emotional Intelligence. The hypothesis tested was that self-management (Choose Yourself) mediates the relationship between self-awareness (Know Yourself) and the pursuit of purpose (Give Yourself) for a sample of 350 working professionals. The analysis confirmed that emotional intelligence works sequentially, with Know Yourself as the strongest direct driver of purpose (beta = 0.41), while Choose Yourself offers a meaningful complementary pathway (beta = 0.36–0.26). This partial mediation effect highlights the function of intentional self-regulation as a major enhancer of purposeful action. Theoretically, the study contributes by adding granularity to the field of Emotional Intelligence, by validating a dynamic process model (Know–Choose–Give) using Structural Equation Modelling, moving beyond traditional trait-based perspectives. In practice, it offers useful insights for Learning and Development practitioners by identifying Choose Yourself as an important bridge, helping organisations focus on decision-making and emotion regulation skills in leadership development programs. There are limitations to the study. The study is cross-sectional, so we cannot observe developmental changes over time. The study is limited to one cultural context, so the generalisability of findings might be limited. In future research, longitudinal approaches should be used to track the development of “Choose” competencies, test the model across different industries, and include moderating variables, such as organisational culture, to understand contextual factors better. In summary, self-awareness is the first step on the emotional intelligence journey, but self-management helps people lead and live with purpose.

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