

# IMPROVING YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE.

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## **Abstract**

*Leaders create the context within which we work. Leaders can create a productive, happy, healthy context where employees feel valued, inspired, motivated, and where they feel they can produce their best work. Likewise, leaders can create the opposite environment where employees feel dread as they think about entering the work environment and they would leave the organization at the first opportunity. Given the importance of leaders and leadership on the effectiveness and on the productivity of an organization leaders must, therefore, understand how to inspire and ignite passion to make employees happy and keep employees healthy so that they stay and contribute to their full potential for their whole careers. This paper is an attempt to highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in improving the leadership skills.*

## **The new Era of Leadership**

John Adair, the leading British authority on the subject, says 'leadership, like all personal relations, always has something unknown, something mysterious about it'. But there is a clue in that comment - the phrase 'personal relations'. To attempt a partial definition, leadership is very much about the ability to influence people by personal attributes and behaviours. But most people would say that even successful leaders they have known do not behave in identical ways. They may, in fact, act very differently even in similar situations and they may have quite different personalities. Moreover, different leadership qualities may be needed in different circumstances. The classic example is perhaps Churchill, who was a great war leader but less successful in peacetime. All this may lead to the conclusion that there is no single template of leadership behaviours, which in turn poses the question of whether leaders can be developed: what are the qualities (or competencies) of leadership, and how can they be brought out?

People vary in their capacity for leadership. A few have innate capacity, some have none, but most potential managers have it in some degree. Selection of the right people, whether from inside or outside the organisation, is a good part of the battle, but then they will need training. This may be only a small part of their development but it is important to get it right.

However, before people can become successful leaders, they do need certain attributes:

- General intelligence, although not necessarily being very much brighter than the people they are leading.
- Technical or professional knowledge and competence in their particular fields – how otherwise would leaders be respected?

- Personality: leaders should be energetic and committed, maintain contact with their people and understand their strengths and weaknesses.
- The ability to inspire, although this quality may be rarer than some of the others and is perhaps the most difficult to develop.
- Listening, sharing and delegating skills (and not interfering unnecessarily), because in groups of more than around five people it becomes impossible to know all the necessary detail.
- Self-knowledge, to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, which in turn will enable them to turn to others in their group to compensate for their own biases or deficiencies.

All these attributes will help to develop trust, without which leaders will not command loyalty. The last four, 'softer', non-technical attributes might be summed up as 'emotional intelligence', a subject which now seems to be gaining a place on management and leadership development programmes.

### **Why Is Emotional Intelligence Important?**

Being successful is much more than just intelligence. Researchers generally agree that IQ only accounts for about 4% to 20% of results. Research shows that the critical factor for sustained achievement is not only a function of ability or talent but 80% of achievement is dependent on emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has proven to be twice as important as any other competency in any job role. The tougher and more challenging the role the more Emotional Intelligence becomes the important factor in success.

Compelling research shows that IQ and technical skill combined are no longer sufficient to succeed in today's customer-focused, team-centered, and ever-changing organizational climate. Leaders and their organizations also need emotional intelligence to optimize performance and maintain a competitive edge:

- Emotional intelligence influences your ability to efficiently cope with daily demands and to be successful in various areas of life. By increasing your emotional intelligence, you become more efficient, productive, and successful. You also can create greater emotionally and physical well-being. Further, the emotionally intelligent individual pursues goals with vision, perseverance, and energy. Research has indicated that the following EI competencies predict success at work: self-awareness, emotional resilience, decisiveness, interpersonal sensitivity, influencing skills, conscientiousness, integrity, and personal motivation.
- Research has documented that emotional intelligence is twice as critical in leadership performance as IQ and technical skill. Successful leaders have a high emotional IQ. Emotional intelligence competencies have a positive impact on creating and sustaining a positive organizational culture. Emotional competence also prevents executive derailment.
- Emotionally intelligent leaders are not only more successful but also create a culture that is characterized by greater morale, increased employee satisfaction and productivity, improved return on investment in change efforts, and greater success in achieving desired performance goals.

- Top performers are more productive . . . and it is mostly emotional competence that makes them that way. A leading research firm found that for all jobs, emotional intelligence accounts for 66% of successful job performance compared to IQ and technical skills, and 85% for leaders.
- Emotional intelligence is the single most important element in a group's performance. The group's emotional quotient is reflected in how effectively they collaborate. A low group emotional quotient results in a group working dumber by not allowing people to share talents, allowing destructive discontent, domineering, and infighting, degrading performance, and stymieing progress.
- Neurological research has shown that our physiological processes are affected by what we think, feel and how we react. It also shows that the inability to manage ourselves efficiently leads to premature aging, diminished mental clarity, and blocked access to our innate intelligence.
- Job stress has become "the 20<sup>th</sup> century disease" and is considered a global epidemic. Seventy five percent of all doctor visits in the US today are for stress-related disorders. Emotional stresses include irritation, feeling unloved, frustration, frequent hurt feelings, fear of losing control, anxiety, fears and phobias, moodiness and depression. Emotionally intelligent people know how to relate to and handle stress effectively and show great resiliency in the face of setbacks.

### **Emotionally Intelligent Leaders**

The rules for leadership have changed in the past few years. The rules for work are changing. We are being judged by a new yardstick: not just how smart we are, or by our training, experience and expertise, but also by how well we handle each other. Technical expertise does not mean the ability to lead. Sometimes leaders fail just because of their inability to manage relationships and change. A study reveals some specific reasons for leadership failure: Insensitive to others, aloof, betrays trust, controlling/micromanages, not strategic, can't adapt to new management, poor hiring practices, and does not handle performance problems.

While IQ and technical skills are necessary for success, emotional intelligence is what truly differentiates extraordinary leaders, individuals, teams and organizations from mediocre ones. Emotional intelligence refers to an assortment of emotional, personal, and interpersonal abilities and skills that influence one's overall capability to effectively cope with environmental pressures and demands. Emotional intelligence plays an important role in intelligent behavior and is vital for successful performance in the workplace and personally. Emotional intelligence is what motivates us to pursue our unique potential and purpose. It activates our innermost values and aspirations, transforming them from things we think about to how we live. It is concerned with understanding self and others, relating to people, adapting, and coping with the environment.

Emotional intelligence is distinct from but complimentary to academic intelligence, the purely cognitive capacity measured by IQ. Unlike IQ that does not significantly change over one's life time, emotional intelligence can be taught and learned. It requires commitment to develop one's competencies and skills through repeated application, practice, and feedback.

### **'Feel good' factor**

Looking at the emotional intelligence of teams is important because most of the work in organizations today is done by teams. Leaders have a pressing need today to make teams work together better. When people feel good, they work better and are more creative and productive. Good feelings are like lubrication for the brain -- mental efficiency goes up, memory is sharpened, people can understand directions and make better decisions. Studies have shown this to be especially true when it comes to teams. This is because emotions are contagious. When one or two people are in a good mood, it spreads easily to other members.

A team's effectiveness can depend on how well it works together in harmony. A leader skilled in creating good feelings can keep cooperation high. Good team leaders know how to balance the focus on productivity with attention to member's relationships and their ability to connect. There is even research that shows that humor at work can stimulate creativity, open lines of communications, and enhance a sense of trust. Playful joking increases the likelihood of concessions during a negotiation. Emotionally intelligent team leaders know how to use humor and playfulness with their teams.

Creating good moods in employees may be even more important than previously thought. It is common sense to see that workers who feel upbeat will go the extra mile to please customers and therefore improve the bottom line. There is research to show that for every one percent improvement in the service climate, double is increase in revenue. New research from a range of industries now reaffirms the link between leadership and climate and to business performance. According to Daniel Goleman in *Primal Leadership* (2002), how people feel about working at a company can account for 20 to 30 percent of business performance.

Part of understanding the emotional reality of a team is uncovering the particular habits ingrained in a team or organization that can drive behaviors. A prime example is the notion of "It's just the way we do things here." The team leader is effective when he or she looks for signs that reveal if such habits are working or not. It is the leader's job to explore and expose unhealthy work habits in order to build more effective group norms.

Research conducted by McKee 2002 shows that opening up a shared language promotes unity, and this is how to see the organization succeed and what is getting in the way of that success. A process that involves focused conversations and open ended questions intended to get at people feelings is utilized. This process helps the creation of the ideal vision of the company, supporting the premise that 'a company that communicates within it perimeters is the company that can communicate to the world'. While this might strike some business leaders as a bit removed from business issues, it is only when people talk about their feelings that they uncover root causes of problems in the culture and the true sources of inspiration around them.

### **Is it Rational to be emotional?**

Human beings have emotions. We may not know exactly where emotions fit into the biological evolutionary scheme, but we do know that emotions influence our reaction to and perception of other people, events and situations. Emotional

reactions are largely an unconscious process – we cannot leave them at home or pack them into a storeroom locker when we go into our workplace. Emotions can color how we perceive situations to the extent that we are no longer aware of the reality of a situation but only our own emotional perception of it. Clearly, this can make clear communication and decision making difficult if everyone involved in a situation has their own emotional take on it. Since we cannot just get rid of unwanted emotions we have to learn how to be aware of them in our self and others to have clearer perception in our communication processes and not just fall into habitual patterns of emotional response.

Daniel Goleman, a leading proponent of Emotional Intelligence, emphasizes that leaders have to pay attention to the hidden dimensions; people's emotions, the undercurrents of the emotional reality in the organization, and the culture that holds it all together. Goleman states that self and other awareness, empathy and listening are all emotional intelligence constructs; all contribute to self-development training. Effective leadership development begins with a holistic vision of one's life. To achieve improved business performance, leaders need to be emotionally engaged in their self-development

The word 'emotion' tends to create a certain amount of resistance in the commercial arena: 'emotion' is a word usually associated solely with personal relations outside of the workplace, and things like 'emotions and feelings' should be controlled and subjugated in a working environment. But the life-blood of an organization is its people, and emotions and feelings are essential elements of human communication and relationship.

There is nothing wrong with being emotional if the impulses are positive and aimed for the greater benefit for society at large. An emotionally matured leader tends to be in touch with his feelings. He knows that high EQ is about managing emotions and not overcome by them. In this realistically optimistic approach leaders won't let setbacks and disappointments derail them. Emotions are the vital forces for the values and principles each one of us live for and they drive our focus, actions and its speed.

To lead with emotional intelligence is to inspire, to motivate, to instill a sense of worth, belonging, confidence, and to compel others to work to their fullest potential. Successful leadership is measured by the emotions of others. How does one develop such leadership skills? Leadership experts seem to agree that it requires an 'inside-out' approach to developing leaders. It becomes critical for leaders to increase their awareness of their ability to manage themselves and their relationships with others. Emotional intelligence appears to be in addition to cognitive intelligence, as measured by one's IQ, and not a component of it. To lead with emotional intelligence involves an examination of the foundational skills and competencies that underlay leadership competencies. It involves a thorough understanding of the component parts of emotional intelligence and how each one can be developed in the workplace for greater organizational effectiveness.

### **Managing Emotions**

It begins in infancy when our significant care givers 'teach' us to be comforted and to comfort ourselves, and later on, to comfort others. In the psychological literature this self-comfort is called 'self-soothing.' This is the beginning of emotional self-awareness. Then, for example, as toddlers we learn from significant others that we must control some of our basic drives and temptations and we learn impulse

control. We get all kinds of messages from our caregivers as we grow and we incorporate those into our Self Regard, Independence, etc. Daniel Goleman proposed the phrase emotional intelligence with the publication of the book bearing this same title in 1995. Researchers in earlier studies had used the term, but this book was the first to be widely embraced by popular culture. Goleman identified five core competencies of emotional intelligence that include knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships. Goleman narrowed these competencies into four domains in 2002. The domains include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

### **The 'You' approach**

Perhaps it would be better to simplify the concept. Emotional intelligence increases when people commit themselves to building practical competencies in the context of every day situations. One of the foundation skills that contribute to a manager's or leader's success is the skill of empathy. It starts with self-awareness, in that understanding your own emotions is essential to understanding the feelings of others. It is crucial to effective communication and to leading others.

Empathy can be defined as the ability to see things from the other person's point of view- to be able to "walk in someone else's moccasins." Goleman defines it as the ability to read other people. Other definitions include the concept of identifying with the other person or their situation. This implies more than a cognitive understanding, more than just remembering a similar situation that you may have gone through yourself. Empathy means that you can recall some of those same feelings based on your own memories. There is a sharing and identifying with emotional states.

Empathy as a competency skill is poorly understood by those who need it most, and it is even more difficult to train and acquire. Most people believe you either have it or you don't. Many hard-driving managers lack a propensity for developing empathy because they assume it's for the more "touchy-feely" types. Some very intelligent leaders are walking around blindly using only their powers of reasoning and wondering why everyone doesn't see things their way.

Research by the Center for Creative Leadership has found that the primary causes of derailment in executives involve deficits in emotional competence, and in particular, these three primary ones:

1. Difficulty in handling change.
2. Not being able to work well as a team.
3. Poor interpersonal relations.

Without an adequate capacity to understand the other's point of view, some managers lack sufficient flexibility for change, cannot work well with team collaboration, and cannot relate well with the very people that affect the results they are trying to achieve.

What does this have to do with running a business, managing a company and dealing with bottom-line performance issues? Obviously, if managers were to take the time to listen with empathy at everything that was said, nothing would get done. Furthermore, one cannot fall prey to being swept up into every person's

story. Managers and leaders must keep the focus and guide people to goal completion.

According to Goleman, empathy represents the foundation skill for all the social competencies important for work:

1. Understanding others: Sensing others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns.
2. Service orientation: Anticipating, recognizing and meeting customers' needs.
3. Developing others: Sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities.
4. Leveraging diversity: Cultivating opportunities through diverse people.
5. Political awareness: Reading the political and social currents in an organization

Managers and leaders are usually high in those traits and characteristics that lead to successful goal completion, such as high achievement orientation and high focusing abilities. That's why they get promoted to managing positions. Success depends a great deal on having focus, being able to persevere, and being able to concentrate. But focus alone can result in undesirable consequences if not counterbalanced by empathy. Focus alone will not result in the fulfillment of goals. Focus and empathy will.

Empathy skills are those that involve paying attention to other people- things like listening, attending to needs and wants of others, and building relationships. When empathy skills are high, one is more likely to inspire the troops. When a manager understands his/her people and communicates that to them, he/she is more liked and respected. And that is how practicing empathy results in better performance. When a manager is respected, the people they lead are more likely to go the extra mile. Empathy and focus need to be balanced, and when they are, managing skills are optimally effective.

Both managers and employees need empathy in order to interact well with customers, suppliers, the general public and with each other. Managers need it even more when they are assigning a task to someone who won't like it; when offering criticism to someone who predictably will get defensive; when having to deal with someone we don't like; when dealing with employee disputes; and when giving bad news such as telling someone that they won't be promoted or that they're being laid off. The first step in dealing with any negativity is to empathize. The next step is to focus back to the goals and the tasks at hand.

In reviewing emotional intelligence competencies, a high level of skill in any or all of them couldn't hurt a career. In fact, many experts agree that these competencies are relevant to professions that involve either managing others or being part of an effective team. In his book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman goes one step further. He claims that for professions in which the intellectual entry hurdle is particularly high, emotional intelligence is the dominant differentiator for performance. Goleman is not the first, nor will he be the last, to reach this conclusion. Assume for a moment that this is a fact. Can you think of a profession which has an entry hurdle that is high in the area of intellectual horsepower? That's us, folks. Assuming Goleman is correct, in spite of all of the technical

training that actuaries pursue; it is emotional intelligence that differentiates the highest achievers from the rest of the pack. For some this might not feel like great news, especially considering the number of years actuaries spend on technical learning.

### **Can Emotional intelligence be learned?**

The best way is to work one-to-one with someone in a coaching or counselling relationship. Having a professional coach is ideal, and many companies hire coaches to develop the highest level leaders of their organizations. A coach can directly observe your behavior and offer helpful advice for change. He/she can also solicit input from those closest to you to provide insight into how your behaviors are perceived. But even if your company is not providing you with a professional coach, you have your boss, your coworkers and your friends. Enlisting their help can provide real-time feedback and reinforcement. Obviously the basis of any such arrangement is complete trust in the relationship. Each “coach” needs to have your best interests in mind.

Beyond trust, coach selection should be influenced by knowledge; that is, pick a coach who has the skill you are looking to enhance. For example, if your boss is a particularly good empathetic listener, she would be a good coach candidate for that specific skill. If she just doesn't seem to have the ability to build a strong network of relationships, then you should find someone who does have that skill-set to coach you in that area. Many companies' Organizational Development departments also have processes set up to support such employee growth.

After coaching or counseling, group courses and workshops are the next best way to develop emotional intelligence and following that, there are a lot of resources available for those who want to learn more on their own. In each case, the steps involved are to learn more about your current level of emotional intelligence through the use of an assessment tool. One of the best on the market is Dr. Rueven Baron's Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) which is a 133 item, web-enabled, scientifically validated, assessment or inventory of one's emotional intelligence competencies. There are some Indian adaptations also. Also available is the EQ-360 which is based on the EQ-i and is based on the same model of emotional intelligence.

### **The last Word**

This isn't to say that technical skills are trumped by emotional intelligence. Technical skills are a gateway to more opportunity. As levels of responsibility increase, technical skills become table stakes. The higher you ascend in an organization the more technical skills are like compulsory tumbling for a gymnast. You must do them perfectly in order to be allowed to continue on to the medal round. To win the medals you need special skills, and in the area of management and leadership those skills are the competencies of emotional intelligence.

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